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July 21, 1885.

Vol. XVII.

Single
Number.

PUBLISHED WEEKLY BY BEADLE AND ADAMS,
No. 98 WILLIAM STREET, NEW YORK.

Price,
5 Cents.

No. 417.



"NOW, YOUNGSTER," SAID THE VILLAIN, WINGER, TURNING WITH A SHUDDER FROM THE BLACK DEPTHS BELOW, "IF YOU'VE ANYTHING TO SAY, SAY IT QUICK."

OR,

The Boy Bear-Slayer of the Sierras.

BY OLL COOMES,

AUTHOR OF "WHIP-KING JOE," "LITTLE FOX-FIRE," "MINKSKIN MIKE," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

BEARSLAYER.

It is night in Virginia City. A thousand twinkling lights on the side of Mount Davidson mark the location of the famous camp. Every light represents a cabin or residence. High up the mountain-side, above all others, a single light straggles down through the night. It shines from the window of a little cabin whither we would take the reader, and having climbed the hillside and reached the door, we enter the domicile.

We find it has but a single occupant—a youth of perhaps sixteen years. He is above the medium height, and as he stands erect in his shirt-

sleeves, his head bare, we see a specimen of noble manhood even in the boy. He seems the very embodiment of health and strength; he is broad-shouldered, deep-chested and sinewy; the very poise of his head is indicative of the alertness of the deer, his movements the suppleness of the panther. His eyes are of a dark blue, his hair long and wavy; his mouth, his nose, and, in fact, every lineament of his face, bears evidence of dashing courage, manly dignity and honor.

The interior of the cabin does not indicate its being the home of a miner, but rather that of a hunter. There are several guns, pistols and knives of various kinds and patterns hanging in racks and in sheaths against the wall. A pallet of bearskins is in one corner, and there are deer and wolf-skins and other trophies of the chase about the room. In short, the cabin is the home of a hunter. The youth we have met is the occupant. His name is Ned Hooker, or as he is better known in the camp, Bearslayer, the Boy Hunter of the Sierras.

No one in Virginia City was better known than the young hunter. He had won a name and fame as the slayer of many a fierce grizzly. He was a natural-born Nimrod and lover of adventure. He preferred the rifle to the pick and shovel. He roamed the hills through, for the wild excitement there was in it. By the death of two friends—one a relative—who were killed by grizzly bears, he had been led to wage a war of extermination upon the ferocious beasts of the mountains. And his success had been most remarkable while his hair-breadth escapes had been many and miraculous. He had been encouraged in his work of destruction by a number of wealthy miners, who gave him, in addition to a bounty on every scalp, a handsome price for every bearskin brought in, so that he had an income in money, as well as the sport and adventure, in his dangerous calling of bear-hunter.

The boy was a great favorite among the old men and young in Virginia City and outlying camps, and many a pleasant evening the miners spent in the cabin of the intelligent and jolly young rifleman to listen to the recitals of his adventures in the mountains.

But, on the night that we introduce him, his company, several young miners, had left early. It was nearing midnight. Most of the lights in the great camp were out, and Ned was preparing to retire when there came a rap at the door.

Supposing it was some of his friends returning, the young hunter called out:

"Come in!"

At once a tall man in a long coat and with a mask upon his face entered. He was followed by four others, all cloaked and masked.

"Hullo, friends! this is a joke, isn't it?" exclaimed the boy with a smile, showing no signs of fear.

"No, sir," replied the first of the intruders, "it is stern reality as you will find out."

An announcement which did not cause Bearslayer to flinch or manifest any surprise, for he demanded:

"What kind of a surprise-party are you? Vigilantes or road-agents?"

"We are what you term road-agents," replied the spokesman of the maskers.

"Indeed! and why am I indebted for this late call?"

"We have come to ask a favor of you," replied the man.

"To join your party?" questioned the boy.

"Suppose we did make such a request?"

"You'd find you were barking up the wrong tree," was the prompt and indignant reply.

"Well, that's not what we want of you. Knowing you are ever on the ramble through the mountains and likely to find things which, if reported to the Vigilantes, would give us trouble, we want you to either give up bear-hunting or swear that you will never divulge the secrets of the surrounding mountains."

"Gettin' uneasy, eh?" retorted the boy; "but, suppose I refuse to quit huntin' bears, or to swear myself to secrecy?"

"Then it will be our painful duty to silence you," declared the masked leader. "So, think the matter over before you reply. I think you will decide to obey our wishes."

"Do you take me for a coward?" indignantly demanded the boy.

"Oh, not at all. We take you for a brave and truthful boy, and are afraid the Vigilantes will make a spy of you, so have anticipated them by this call to secure your silence by oath or death."

"Oath or death!" sneered Bearslayer.

"Yes, if you refuse to swear that you will keep a still tongue, death must be your fate,"

said a second outlaw, displaying a rope with a noose on the end of it.

But the sight of the rope had a contrary effect from what they had expected upon the boy. Instead of being frightened Ned was stirred to anger and defiance.

"Curse you and your rope!" he hissed, "I defy you to force me to take the oath of a coward!"

As he spoke Bearslayer stepped back and reached for the revolver on the wall, but, before he could lift it from its holster, two powerful men seized him by the arms and held him powerless until his hands were bound at his back. Then the rope's noose was thrown around his neck and the other end of the line thrown over a beam, overhead.

"Now, then, what shall it be, boy? death or the oath?" demanded one of the men.

"I consider it an honor to die rather'n compromise with outlaws and murderers!" was the defiant reply. "Hang away! Do your worst you black-hearted villains; I am only a boy, but I never yet flinched in the face of death."

"That will do, men; restore him to liberty!" commanded one of the maskers, in a satisfied tone.

As one of the men cut the fearless youth's bonds a strange voice—a voice from the darkness outside—suddenly exclaimed:

"Hold! that will not do!"

At the same moment six men, all masked and with revolvers in hand, stalked into the room and confronted the others upon whose breasts they leveled their weapons, their leader saying in a stern voice:

"Gents, you are playing a double game, but we hold a full hand over you. Draw a weapon and we'll fire."

"What in the plague does this mean?" Bearslayer demanded, unable to conceal his surprise any longer.

"Who are you?" called out the leader of the first masked party, his voice betraying no little agitation.

"That is none of your business," said the leader of the second party; "we have the drop on you, and demand that you unmask your faces, this moment."

"You are not Vigilantes," said the leader of the first party making a sign with his hand that none of those before him seemed to recognize.

"Neither are you road-agents," responded the other, "and we will give you just one minute to remove those masks from your faces that we may see who you are, or we will shoot every man of you!"

The two parties stood about six feet apart, the one with drawn revolvers, the others with their hands at their hips. That a bloody fray was to be soon enacted Bearslayer had not a doubt, and which of the parties, if either, was friendly to him he could not tell. He was satisfied, however, that they were enemies to each other—that one was a party of outlaws and the other Vigilantes.

It was rather a peculiar and trying situation for the boy. In case of a conflict he would be unable to take a hand in it through fear of injuring a friend, and since neither party seemed disposed to let its true character be known, he conceived a plan to avert a conflict. So, turning, he quickly blew out the light, wrapping the room in blinding darkness, at the same time dropping flat on the floor.

Oaths and exclamations escaped the lips of the masqueraders; the clink of rising pistol-hammers was quickly followed by the flash and report of the weapons in the hands of the last comers. To this fire the others at once responded. The dull "spat" of the bullets was heard on the walls of the cabin, mingled with a sharp cry of pain and the hasty shuffling of feet.

Out through the open door Bearslayer saw a shadowy form stagger, quickly followed by others, and in less than half a minute the room was deserted by the combatants; then all became as quiet as the grave in and around the cabin.

When assured that no one lingered in the room, the boy arose, struck a light and examined his surroundings. He found blood upon the floor and a couple of crimson trails leading to and out at the door. This discovery told him that the conflict was no farce. But, who were the combatants?

This question confused, mystified Ned, but, after reflecting a few moments upon it, his surprise and wonder changed into indignation. He could conceive no reason why he should be treated so rudely, insultingly; nor why his cabin should be made the scene of such a tragedy. But, what puzzled him most was the voice of the leader of the second party of mask-

ers. It sounded like that of one who had always been a welcomed guest in his cabin—one whom he had regarded as a friend, and he could not dismiss the thought that he had been singled out as the victim of some treacherous plot. However, he was not certain of this, for he knew no reason why any man's hand should be raised against him; but, with a firm resolution, characteristic of his fearless spirit, he determined to know the truth, and if his suspicions proved correct, meet the foe upon his own ground.

Nor was there a moment to be lost in carrying out his resolutions; so at once donning his hunting-jacket and cap, and arming himself with a knife and revolver, Ned glided out into the night, a self-constituted detective.

CHAPTER II.

SILENT DEATH-BLOWS.

It was past midnight and the moon was high in the heavens when Bearslayer stepped out into the night. Mount Davidson rose up grim and somber above his head. Virginia City lay at his feet, voiceless and silent.

The barking of wolves could be heard over in the mountains, but this sound seemed only to make the silence more oppressive.

Which way he should turn the resolute lad knew not now that he was ready for work. Had it been lighter he might have followed one or the other of the parties by the trail of blood leading out of his cabin. He was satisfied that the party, the voice of whose leader had so startled him—they who came last were outlaws, and these he wished to follow. But, there were many ways leading into the mountain fastnesses they could have taken, and to strike the right one was what bothered any trailer, no matter how expert. However, he was possessed of that wonderful faculty so essential to the successful mountaineer, scout and hunter, of determining facts by the voices of the night.

Off toward the southwest the howling of the wolves had changed to short, sharp yelps and barks that appeared to be retiring further away into the hills, and the keen-eared lad jumped at the conclusion that the beasts, attracted by the scent of blood, were following the outlaws.

Without further hesitation, he bounded in the direction whence the sound came, and nimbly almost as a deer sped over the way. In less than an hour he was traversing a low, wooded valley which, as he advanced, grew deeper and narrower, until it became a deep canyon, with towering walls on either side. The darkness increased with the depth of the pass, but this did not trouble the young pathfinder. Every foot of the way was familiar to him, and having no doubt but that he was upon the trail of his enemies, he pressed on. He had every hope of overtaking them, for he felt sure they were incumbered with one or two wounded men. This hope was strengthened by the fact that he was, at least, gaining rapidly upon the wolves, whose noise still continued in the pass before him.

Another hour's pursuit brought him almost within a stone's throw of the yelping pack, which, in a body, was moving slowly westward, without a doubt following something, or some one, that gave them hope for a feast.

The pursuer now began to realize that he was in some danger of the wolves himself. The animals were fierce mountain wolves, and if maddened by the scent of fresh blood might turn upon him as soon as his presence was discovered.

However, the young hunter was not to be turned from his course by possible dangers. The patter of footsteps and a low snarl suddenly fell upon his ears. He stopped. A pair of glowing orbs appeared in the blackness before him; then he knew that the rear guard of the pack had turned upon him. He drew his revolver but at once returned it to its holster. He dare not fire else the report of the weapon might bring other dangers upon him. He unsheathed his knife and making a spring at the wolf, the cowardly brute scampered away; but in a few minutes it returned with several of its mates and confronted the boy again.

The pack had now been alarmed, and soon no less than a score of the wrangling, shaggy brutes were skirmishing around him.

Bearslayer, seeing that he was to have serious trouble, backed up against a rock, determined to defend himself with club and knife until absolutely forced to use his revolver.

The ravenous creatures pressed him closely, but he laid right and left about him with his club, and thus kept them back. The unequal contest was maintained by the boy with desperate vigor. Great beads of perspiration started from his face, and his breath came quick and hard; yet, despite his exertions the maddened wolves pressed closer and closer.

Suddenly a new din was added to the noise of the beasts. It was the shout of five or six men who charged upon the pack, firing right and left with their revolvers into the shaggy mass. In a twinkling the wolves had vanished, but in the darkness Bearslayer could not tell whether he was now confronted by friends or foes, and he stood against the rock, motionless and silent.

"There's the young coyote!" a voice suddenly yelled out, and before Ned had time for even a thought, five men sprung from the shadows upon him.

A struggle ensued, and blows were struck, but the brave boy was soon overpowered, disarmed and made prisoner by the very band of outlaws he had followed from his cabin door!

One of the rascals lit a match and held it before the lad's face to make sure of his identity.

"Yes, it's the young bloodhound," he said; "you thought you'd play it fine, but I was watchin' you when you left your cabin and folered at your nimble heels."

"Bearslayer," said another outlaw—the very one whose voice had startled the boy in his cabin, "what induced you to follow us?"

"Your voice that I have heard many times in apparent friendship in my cabin," retorted the boy; but no sooner had he spoken than he would have recalled the hasty and indiscreet words had it been possible to do so.

"By the Utah Saints!" exclaimed an outlaw, "he recognizes you, Lieutenant Zill."

"His own admission," replied the man addressed as Lieutenant Zill, "is his death warrant. Sixty, you and Winger take him at once to the Devil's Gap and consign him to the keeping of its dragon. He knows too much ever to escape, and the Gap leaves no trail behind."

"Come along, then!" ordered Winger, a powerful man, who seized the lad by the arm and fairly dragged him along.

The prisoner's hands had been tied at his back, and therefore were powerless. He made up his mind that his time had come, but resolved to meet his fate without murmur. He knew full well what the Devil's Gap was—an abyss but a few feet wide, and yet hundreds of feet in depth. It was not far away, in the mouth of a defile that branched off from the one they had been traversing.

To prevent his escape an outlaw walked on either side of the boy, holding on to his arm. The gloom of the pass was deep, but the ground seemed perfectly familiar to the freebooters, and they moved along toward the abyss without hesitation.

Coming to where half a dozen ponies were hitched, and a lifeless form lay stretched upon the earth, "Lieutenant" Zill and two of his companions stopped, while the two with the young hunter moved on.

A hundred paces further on they came to the edge of the chasm known as the Devil's Gap, which was approached with caution and a deep sense of awe.

When the three stood upon its brink they could hear the sullen roar of water far down in its black depths. A current of cold air came up and rustled the foliage of the pines overhanging the gap.

"Now, youngster," said the villain, Winger, turning with a shudder from the black depths below, "if you've anything to say, say it quick. We alers give a feller that chance, and—"

The fellow's speech suddenly ended in a wild, unearthly shriek of agony. He fairly leaped into the air, clutching at his side as he did so. Then he reeled to and fro, and losing his balance, plunged headlong into the Devil's Gap, a horrible, terrifying scream from his lips trailing down into the black depths.

With an involuntary cry Bearslayer and his other captor started back, in sudden terror; but before the cry of Winger had ceased ringing on the night, "Sixty" uttered a shriek, and almost doubling himself backward fell to the earth, writhing in his frightful agony.

Bearslayer was thunderstruck to say the least. Around him the shadows were deep. The innumerable tree-trunks were blended in one solid mass of blackness. He could neither see nor hear anything except the groans of the stricken man at his feet, and the hollow, gurgling moans that were still coming up faintly from the abyss. He could not imagine what had so suddenly smitten the outlaws unless it were the breath of the legendary Dragon of Devil's Gap. But, why had not he too been smitten, if such was true? Surely the reputed monster was no respecter of persons.

The boy stood gazing around him, then was startled by the sound of Zill's voice. The outlaw and his two men were coming to the rescue, and

as they approached a voice in the darkness above the young hunter seemed to whisper:

"Fly, stranger, and save your life! Quick!" Bearslayer's hands were still tied, but there was nothing to prevent his escape, and turning, he slipped away before Zill came upon the scene.

Within earshot of the outlaws the lad stopped to ascertain, if possible, the source of his deliverance.

"What in the dickens is the matter here?" Zill asked excitedly, as he came up to where Sixty lay rolling in pain.

"Oh God!" groaned the writhing wretch, "I've been stung to death! Poor Winger's dead and in the gap! The dragon—"

"And where's that boy?" broke in Zill furiously.

"I don't know," replied the suffering man, "but do help me from this accursed place!"

Filled with no little fear Zill and his companions assisted "Sixty" to his feet, and started with him toward the horses; but they had gone only a few paces when one of the men uttered a piercing cry of agony, and falling forward upon his face, gave a few convulsive gasps and expired.

The source from whence the silent blow had come was a mystery, and the outlaw "lieutenant" and his uninjured friend would have fled from the spot had Sixty not clung to their arms with the tenacity of death. As it was, they hustled him along with remarkable speed, and soon had him seated in his saddle.

Bearslayer, having fortunately freed his hands of their fetters, followed, as close as he dared, at the villains' heels. He had no fears of the ruffians, now. They were terror-stricken while he was himself filled with fear and uncertainty. He could not think that the death of the two outlaws had been the work of the mythic Dragon of Devil's Gap, for he was not at all superstitious; and yet the whole affair was a startling mystery.

Listening, the youth finally heard one of the excited outlaws ask:

"Had we best try to take 'Rusty's' body, or hurry on without it?"

"The captain will never forgive us if we don't take the body in," was the reply. "Rusty was a friend of the captain's, and each promised that whoever died first should have decent burial by the other. We'd better try and take him."

"Then let's be about it with a will."

"Rusty" was the outlaw who had died of his wounds received in Bearslayer's cabin.

"My God!" Zill was suddenly heard to exclaim; "what is in the air of this accursed spot to-night? Rusty's body is bloated to twice its natural size! Tobe, we'll have to leave it after all, and hurry on, or else this night's deplorable work will end in the death of all of us."

So saying, the two brigands mounted their horses and with the wounded friend and the riderless ponies rode away.

Bearslayer sat down. Something akin to horror's fascination held him to the spot. It was not long until daylight and he resolved to wait.

An hour went by and objects around him were gradually unfolded from the blending shadows. The first thing the boy noticed was the form of the dead outlaw lying covered with a gray blanket, and, from appearances, frightfully bloated.

Day finally dawned. A noisy bird perched itself in a tree over the silent form and began chattering shrilly.

At this juncture Bearslayer started, his eyes fixed upon the body. He saw it move; he saw the blanket flung aside, and the supposed dead man rise to a sitting posture, and gaze around him in apparent bewilderment.

A look of mingled surprise and contempt settled upon the boy's face. He recognized the supposed dead and bloated outlaw at a glance! It was one Webfoot Mose, a notorious tramp and bum, who for months had been "beating" the camps of Gold Hill and Virginia City!

A man of perhaps thirty or thirty-five years of age, he was under medium height and a regular Jack Falstaff in obesity. A big round head was set upon a short, fat neck between broad, massive shoulders. His short arms terminated in huge, fat hands, whose digits could scarcely be closed over the puffy palms. His moccasined feet harmonized with the rest of his person, being so short and wide as to be suggestive of the pedal extremities of a web-footed fowl—so noticeable in fact, as to give rise to the pseudonym of Webfoot Mose. His big round face was devoid of beard, smooth and ruddy as a baby's. He had a large blue eye, a "Jewish" nose, and a mouth expressive of good nature and an easy, careless disposition.

He was dressed in buckskin trowsers supported by a pair of red leather suspenders that showed off well over a blue miner's shirt. An old, slouched felt hat covered his head. His feet were incased in buckskin moccasins.

He carried no weapons that were visible unless a short rough cane, stout enough to knock a bull down, be considered such.

How the fat vagabond had come there was the next question with Bearslayer, and he was half-inclined to think the fellow was in league with the outlaws. But, whatever the facts in the case might be, he resolved to make his presence known, and at once emerged from his concealment among the pines and hailed him thus:

"Hullo here! Good-morning, Fatty!"

"Whew! morning-glories!" exclaimed the tramp, apparently surprised and yet rejoiced at sight of the boy; "it's Bearslayer, the Boss Boy of Virginny, or I'm a walkin' skeleton!"

"Webfoot, what are you doing here so far from a saloon? I'm astonished, man, to find you adrift so far from camp."

"I am, too, Bearbutcher," rejoined the tramp, "but I see you hav'n't heard the latest news—that the Vigilantes gave we gents of leisure and constitootional weariness just so long to leave camp and we left, you can bet! All the other lovers of rest racked out for other camps, but I took to the hills. Tired of life I came over here into the vicinity of the Devil's Gap hoping that the Dragon what dwells there in its black depths might fan me into eternal rest; but nary dragon, nor nary fan have I seen. I believe the story's all a red-skin lie gotten up for the benefit of outlaws."

"See here, old posey," said Bearslayer, satisfied now that the fat vagabond was deliberately lying, "you're trying to deceive me. How does it come you were lying there in the place of a supposed dead outlaw?"

"That's an easy question, Bearslayer. I heard a racket up this way—some groanin' an' swearin'—and I tumbled along to see what was up. Stumblin' against the dead man in the dark, an idea popped into my head, and that was to remove the dead while the others were away, roll up in his blanket, stiffen out, and thereby play eavesdropper on the robbers. I didn't s'pose they were goin' on, and when they come for their friend's dead body, and found it all bloated too bad to carry, I thought I'd die for wantin' to laugh. Oh! if they'd ever lit a match an' took a last peep at the body, there'd been music in the air, I tell you! But I had my trouble for my pains!"

"Webfoot Mose!" cried Bearslayer, manifesting his impatience, "you are talking to deceive me. You are playing some bold and desperate game. I now think you are the man who rescued me from the outlaws last night and killed those men on the edge of the abyss."

"Wild, visionary boy! I'm a harmless Quaker. I've no weapon but a single derringer. Did you hear a derringer pipe out? Do I look like a murderous destroyer? Do I look like the Dragon of Devil's Gap?"

"Come with me, will you?" Bearslayer asked, seeing he was to get no satisfaction out of the man.

"Certainly," he answered, and scrambling to his feet, he waddled after the boy.

The two proceeded to where the outlaw lay dead on the edge of the abyss, and examined the body for marks of violence. On the left breast they found a wound which had evidently been made by a slender-bladed knife that had been plunged to the heart.

"There is the death-wound," said Bearslayer; "but who dealt the silent blow?"

"It must be the mark of the Dragon's fangs," answered Webfoot Mose, in apparent uneasiness.

Bearslayer turned and looked the tramp squarely and sharply in the eye. The fat man returned the gaze. There was a momentary silence. A vague suspicion arose in the boy's mind. A smile hovered about the mouth of the tramp.

"Well," Bearslayer finally said, "I'm going back to camp. I've had enough of this—enough adventure to last me a whole year."

"Sorry to have you go, boy," returned Mose, regretfully.

"Won't you go back with me?" asked the boy.

"Never!" declared the tramp, with an air of injured innocence; "but you can give my regards to the Vigilantes, and when you see any of my chums tell 'em to come over and see me—plenty room over here; water's abundant and good, bugs and vegetables are fat, and a feller can live, laze and loll like a Lotus-eater. No; all the gold in the Comstock wouldn't take me

back to camp. I'll be fanged by the Dragon of Devil's Gap first."

With the firm belief that Webfoot Mose was playing a desperate game—that it was he who had dealt those mysterious death-blows and saved his life, Bearslayer reluctantly bade the queer and eccentric vagabond good-by, and started on his return to his cabin on Mount Davidson.

CHAPTER III.

AN UGLY ENCOUNTER.

The rumbling wheels and creaking springs of a heavily-loaded stage-coach mingled with the clatter of the iron-shod hoofs of eight mules and the occasional crack of the driver's long whip, started the echoes of Grizzly Pass, as the vehicle came tearing along the defile going in the direction of Virginia City.

Six passengers were in the coach and three on top with Prince John, the driver—all going in by way of the Golden Gate to seek a fortune in the Golconda of the Sierras made famous by the almost fabulous output of the great Comstock Lode.

Among the passengers in the coach were two ladies—the daughter and niece of Judge John Shannon, a gentleman who had previously located in Virginia City where he now had mining interests of great value and to which he was returning, taking with him his daughter and niece for a temporary if not permanent residence.

Judge Shannon was a man of five-and forty, a lawyer by profession who had honorably won his title as an upright and just judge. His daughter Eva was a maiden of some seventeen years with dark-brown eyes and a face fair and lovely. She was intelligent, bright and vivacious. The music of her voice, the sunshine of her fair face and laughing eyes had, in connection with the grand picturesque scenery of the mountains, made the long journey almost a pleasure excursion.

Miss Edith Baker, the judge's niece, was a woman of perhaps three-and-twenty and possessed of remarkable beauty in form and face. She was accompanying her friends by her uncle's request and it was her intention to make her future home with him and Eva. As she was an orphan and Eva was motherless, the two fair girls found sweet companionship in each other's society.

Although the party had traversed weary miles of the most dreary and perilous mountain road they had met with no accident nor dangers, notwithstanding the hills were reported swarming with tramps, road-agents and hostile Indians.

When they entered Grizzly Pass they were scarcely half a day's journey from their destination, but despite their near approach to the mines, Prince John, the brave and genial driver, dreaded this part of the road more than any other of his division, for twice within the year had he been held up there by road-agents, while his brother drivers had met with similar adventures. It is true that none of his passengers had been injured, though relieved of everything of value about them.

The freebooters had been careful, up to that time, not to disturb the mail and therefore they had not met with government interference, while for the civil authorities they seemed to care nothing whatever.

Prince John would have felt less uneasiness had it not been for his two fair lady passengers. He had never been stopped by outlaws when he had a woman aboard, and he was sorely afraid that the beautiful face of Eva Shannon, if attacked by robbers, might tempt the villains to abduct her and in case of such attempt there would surely be bloodshed and violence.

The pass was many miles in length and wound and twisted with the sinuosity of a serpent's tail among the hills. It was deep, narrow and in places heavily timbered. Twilight shadows ever pervaded the most desolate places. It was an admirable place for the stage-robbers to operate, and the passengers themselves did not fail to note the advantages it offered the plundering villains. Prince John, however, did not betray his uneasiness by word or action except, perhaps that he drove a little faster than had been his wont, though at no time had the passengers complained of slow driving.

Beside the driver sat a loquacious little Irishman whose pipe was never from between his lips except when eating or sleeping. He had ridden days and nights there in the boot and, being naturally a witty and jolly fellow, he had proven himself a rollicking companion to the driver and those who took turns in riding outside.

"And faith, Misther Prince John," the Irishman observed after they were fairly into the

great, darksome pass, and speeding along at a rattling gait, "and why is't that yees are drivin' now as if Ould Nick was after yees?"

"I want to git out of this pass just as soon as possible," said Prince John. "It's a favorite resort of grizzly bears and the darned, measly things have eat up nearly every Irishman that ever attempted to travel through here."

"Och! and by the swate Virgin!" exclaimed Mike fumbling at his revolver in affected fear, "and isn't it queer now, that the bloody bears niver eat up large liars, eh?"

"Well, jokin' aside, Mike," said the driver flinging the silken end of his long whip forward over the lead mules where it exploded with a sharp crack that started the echoes around them, "this is said to be a bear-walk, and I've heard of no less than—well, let me see—no less than five persons being killed herein within the last year or two. But I've the first live grizzly to see in this pass yet. I saw a dead one a few months ago that had been killed by a boy—"

"A b'y!" exclaimed Mike, "and is't the truth yees are givin' us, now?"

"Irishman, it's the gospel truth," continued Prince John, "and I'd have you know that Ned Hooker, or Bearslayer, as he's called, is an eighth-mule-team-with-the-ribbons-in-Prince John's hands. Some two years ago he and two pards older than him, and one of them his brother, war out in the hills prospecting, when they ran afoul of two grizzlies and in the fight, which always ensues unless you git out of the griz's way, Ned's pards were killed. That settled prospectin' for the boy and he become a bloody bearslayer from that very day, and I tell you has made it epidemicish for Old Eph's tribe. It are dangerous work but they say Bearslayer has become an expert and knows exactly whar to locate his bullets in the bear's anatomy. He makes money, too, at the business, for the rich nabobs of the camp gives him a handsome price for every pelt and scalp. He owns a little rat of a Mexican burro and it would do your wicked, Irish heart good to see him mounted on that critter, riding through camp. The last time I seen him he came leading his Jack-rabbit into town with three green grizzly pelts upon it, and all you could see of donkey was its ears and hoofs. But I'd honestly rather meet forty-leven road-agents in this pass than two frolicsome old grizzlies—"

"Hullo, Prince!" suddenly exclaimed one of the passengers, seated behind, "here comes a horseman behind us!"

"Road-agent I'll bet!" exclaimed the driver glancing back over his shoulder—"no it isn't, either; it are—"

"And by the holy Vargin what's that?" suddenly interrupted the little wild Irishman, pointing ahead to two great shaggy forms that had suddenly appeared before them not fifty paces away.

Prince John gave one glance at the objects and then throwing his foot upon the break and giving the lines a violent jerk shouted out:

"Whoa! Grizzlies, by the eternal!"

With the quickness of lightning almost the coach was brought to a stop, and so sudden was it made that the passengers inside were pitched forward into a heap, while Mike Hogan was fired from his seat over the dash-board and falling on the rump of a mule bounded off and fell sprawling on the earth ten feet away.

With a yell like that of a Comanche warrior, the pugnacious Irishman sprung to his feet, and whipping out his revolver began popping away at the grizzlies that were now not over twenty paces away, evincing more surprise at the scene of confusion before them than a disposition for war.

"Stop that shootin', you wild bog-trotter!" yelled Prince John, endeavoring to quiet his team that had become frightened by sight of the bears and the demonstrations of Mike. But his warning came too late. A bullet struck one of the bears and while it inflicted but a slight wound it was sufficient to arouse the volcanic fury of the beast and with a ferocious growl it charged toward the coach followed by its mate.

"In God's name what's the matter out here?" shouted Judge Shannon, throwing open the door of the coach and leaping out.

"Grizzlies, jedge! grizzlies!" cried the excited, terrified Mike.

The mules became unmanageable as the bears advanced, and frantic with affright they swung around to the right so abruptly as to upset the coach, and but for the fortunate fact that the animals became entirely detached from the vehicle, those inside would doubtless have been dragged to death.

The plucky driver was jerked from his seat

and dragged several rods by the frantic beasts before the lines were torn from his hands.

Cries and shrieks of terror issued from the overturned coach.

A piteous cry of agony broke from the lips of one of the passengers who had been riding upon the top of the coach. He had been seized by one of the bears, and in an instant almost crushed to death. Mike Hogan ran, yelling bloody murder for the nearest tree, pursued by the other grizzly.

Dropping the mangled form of the passenger, the first bear—the one Mike's bullet had wounded—charged upon Judge Shannon, who was in the act of assisting his daughter from the coach.

Another instant and he and his child would have been slain by the mad monster, had it not been for the intervening bullet of a rifle that rung out behind him. The bear fell in its tracks, within a few feet of the judge, its head shattered with the terrible missile that had scattered blood and brains on the garments, and in the very face of the judge.

So excited was Shannon, that he had not noticed whence the providential shot had come, and in speechless surprise and terror he gazed around him. His eyes fell upon a young man standing about forty paces away, at the side of a diminutive donkey, his rifle raised and pointed toward the second grizzly. Before he could utter a word—had time for a thought, the weapon of the young stranger boomed out, and a piteous howl of pain from the bear, blended with the other direful sounds that were reverberating through the dismal pass. And as if to make the terror of the situation all the more frightful, some one suddenly yelled out:

"A road-agent! a robber!"

Judge Shannon who, by this time, had become somewhat composed, turned toward the youth whose timely shot had saved his life. The boy was now approaching him, a look of triumph upon his face, his rifle in his left hand, and his donkey following with the docility of a dog at his heels.

"A road-agent!" again yelled a terrified passenger, and at the words, a broad smile overspread the boy's face; but never halting he advanced straight to where Shannon and his daughter stood, saying:

"Folks, I am not a road-agent, but—"

"No, indeed!" suddenly broke in the voice of Prince John, who had not had time until that moment to look about him, "by the beard of Mahomet! that's Ned Hooker—Bearslayer, the Boy Hunter of the Sierras, God bless him!"

CHAPTER IV.

A CAMP-FIRE STORY BY BEARSLAYER.

BLEEDING and bruised, the clothes half-torn from his body in his struggle with his team, Prince John rushed forward and grasping Bearslayer's hand, exclaimed:

"Lord bless you, boy, I say again! You have done some noble work—saved some sweet lives, and—oh thunder! I can't say what I want to. But, Bearslayer, this gentleman is Judge Shannon of Virginia City."

"Bearslayer," said the judge, "I have heard of you often and had ought to know you. I am truly glad to meet you. This, Bearslayer, is my daughter, Eva, and this my niece, Miss Baker."

The young hunter lifted his hat and bowed politely to the ladies, his handsome face coloring slightly.

Eva was so beside herself with joy and excitement that she involuntarily extended her hand to the brave boy and with a look of admiration upon her fair face, exclaimed:

"Oh, sir, you have saved our lives! You are a hero!"

"Thank you for the compliment, Miss Shannon," said the youth, not a little confused, then to the judge he continued: "but, Mr. Shannon, you are wounded—there's blood on your hand at any rate."

The judge glanced at his left hand. It was covered with blood. A little cry burst from Eva's lips. Instantly almost Shannon turned pale and he became conscious of stinging pain in his arm that was soon traced to a flesh wound between his elbow and wrist. There was a hole in his coat-sleeve that looked as though made by a bullet.

"What does it mean, father?" asked Eva, excitedly.

"I do not know," the judge answered, in perplexity.

"I can tell you, judge," said Bearslayer. "It was my bullet that grazed your arm there—the same bullet that killed the bear. I fired as quick as I could and had I been the fraction of a moment later you would have been slain by the grizzly. I was compelled to hold just where I

did to reach a vital spot in the animal's head. You moved your arm as I touched the trigger, and it is well the ball did not meet with more resistance or strike a bone in your arm, or you, instead of the bear, would have been killed, for it was an explosive ball."

"Ah! that accounts for the shattered head of the bear," said Shannon. "But it was a close call for me all around; but they say a miss is good as a mile, and to your skillful marksmanship, Bearslayer, I will ever bear witness, and also be indebted for—"

"Don't speak of 'debtedness, judge," said the boy; "for I done no more than you or any one else should have done. Besides, bear-killing's my business, and while my bullets helped you folks out they will also bring me in at least twenty-five dollars in them grizzlies' pelts. But it looks as if you folks are all in a pretty bad fix here; and I see one poor fellow's been killed."

"Yes, poor Rodgers! he was unable to escape death," said one of the passengers.

"And it's meself that's skeered out of me senses like a whole crazy asylum," piped in the voice of Mike Hogan who had by this time got back to his friends.

"I'm tempestuous glad to see you alive, Mike," said Prince John, "if you did precipitate the trouble with your pop; but friends, this is the worst break that I've had in all my stage-drivin' life. It makes me weary and I feel like goin' away back into the hills and feedin' myself to the bears. But whinin' over spilt milk won't mend matters. Them mules have got to be rescued. I'm goin' to haul that old stage into camp if I have to hitch Mike Hogan in with the other mules to pull us through."

"You can have my donkey, Arizona," said Bearslayer, "if you need another horse for he's a young elephant on the pull."

"And phat a splendid team the baby jackass and Prince Johnny would make," declared Mike, "for, by me honest soul, they look like twins."

"Pity the bear didn't git you, Irishman," retorted the driver; "but what's the use fooling here. Friends, I'm going after them mules at once, and leave you in Bearslayer's care. Don't look for me till I git back, for them cussed critters may not stop short of 'Frisco.'"

After giving some further instructions to be observed during his absence, Prince John took his departure in search of his team.

The first thing the passengers did was to dress each other's wounds and bruises, in which operation they were assisted by the boy hunter.

This done, a grave was hollowed out and the remains of the dead passenger tenderly placed therein and covered over with dirt and stones, the spot being carefully marked that the body might be recovered should relatives ever desire its removal.

Then the coach was turned back upon its wheels, and the scattered baggage and effects of the party gathered up and replaced where it belonged.

Nothing further could now be done except to sit down and await the return of the driver and watch Bearslayer skin the two bears, which operation the young hunter performed with a skill and dexterity that proved quite interesting to the passengers. In a very short time he had peeled off the shaggy coats of the dead monsters, and turning to the passengers, said:

"For fear you may have to remain here longer than you expect, I'd better save some of the choicest parts of the bears for food in case of necessity."

To this all readily assented; and having cut off some meat the youth hung it in the crotch of a bush, then going to a little spring not far away he carefully washed his hands, rolled down his sleeves, and put on his hunting-coat.

The party now engaged in a couple hours' conversation, and then, as Prince John had not yet put in his appearance, and the sun was fast sinking in the west, the boy hunter suggested that, through fear they might not get away from there that day, they make preparations for passing the night. This suggestion meeting general approval, a suitable camping-place was selected under a cluster of pines near the little spring before mentioned. The coach was drawn up, by the united efforts of the men, to the campground.

The ax carried on the stage was brought down, and some wood cut and a camp-fire lighted. As soon as a bed of red coals could be had, Bearslayer proceeded in true hunter style to broil some of the bear-meat, and upon this, along with the remnants of the passengers' last lunch procured at the stage station and cold water from the spring, the party made a hearty supper.

At length the sun went down, and then it

seemed a settled fact that the party would have to remain there that night.

Bearslayer had promised to remain with them till morning, and this fact gave them some ease of mind. The youth had proven himself an intelligent and jolly-hearted companion, and he seemed to have such a perfect knowledge of his surroundings, and was so fertile in expedients to meet emergencies, and so prompt to act, that all felt that his presence and experience would be an assurance of safety.

No one regarded the gallant young mountaineer with greater admiration than did Eva Shannon, though with true maidenly modesty. Her father attributed it to no stronger feeling than that of girlish gratitude for his noble work in saving them from death; but Edith Baker, with woman's intuitive perception, did not fail to notice that her cousin regarded the glances and address of the handsome mountain boy with that confusion which tells of unconscious admiration stronger than mere friendship.

Night finally set in black and ominous in the pass. Nothing had been heard of Prince John yet, and so further arrangements for spending the night there were made. The coach was drawn closer and the space between the seats filled in with baggage and a couch thus prepared for the girls in the vehicle.

The men were assigned more commodious quarters—all outdoors with a blanket and the ground for a bed.

Two of the passengers were placed on guard in the pass, one below and one above camp.

A roaring fire was kept burning not only on account of the chilly, mountain air, but to dispel the depressing gloom. Around this the men finally seated themselves, the girls having taken seats in the stage, and entered into a general conversation.

Finally Judge Shannon said to Bearslayer:

"Ned, I presume you have met with many adventures in your bear-hunting excursions, have you not?"

"Yes, sir," replied the young hunter, "I have had many narrow escapes from both grizzlies and hostile Indians, and some of them have been as ludicrous and amusing as dangerous and thrilling. I had one about one year ago with a wounded grizzly and an Ingin both at the same time. But to appreciate it one had ought to have seen the performances."

"Well, tell us about it, anyhow," said Judge Shannon.

"Yis, reel it off, Bearslayer, for it's me own honest self that loves a lively story," said Mike Hogan.

"I can tell a story on somebody else better than myself," said Bearslayer, "for then I can put on frills and trimmin's, as Old Redwood Bill used to say. But, as I said awhile ago, it was some twelve months ago that I was hunting some twenty miles north of Silver City. I had left Arizona, my donkey, and had gone afoot over a rough, barren ridge and descended into a deep, wooded valley where I knew there was a bear-wallow, which I was going to watch for a pelt or two."

"I was about half-way across the valley when I was suddenly startled by a crashing in some bushes on my right, and before I had time to think a whoppin' old grizzly came tearing out and charged upon me. The brute had been wounded some way—by an Indian I supposed—and it made up its mind to vent its spite on me. Of course, I bounced away about as lively as you ever saw a boy bounce. It was too close for me to undertake to shoot, and I'd hopes by lively work to put distance enough between us to give me time to turn and put a bullet into the critter. The way I whizzed across that valley was equal to the speed of Mike there when he lit out for a tree to-day with that grizzly in pursuit. I had gone about twenty rods when a great fallen tree appeared before me right across my path. I was not over twenty paces from it when I first discovered it, and just as I did, I discovered a Washoe savage in war-paint a few rods beyond the log with his rifle at a trail. I knew the red wretch was as hostile as a rattlesnake and between him and the bear I felt that my chances were slim."

I was too busy trying to keep out of the clutches of the bear to shoot the Ingin. In fact, I preferred holding my fire for the grizzly for, of the two, I feared it most. I'd no time, you see, to turn aside for this would give the bear an advantage in the race and so I bolted straight ahead in hopes the bear'd take after the Ingin when I got close to him."

"Coming to the fallen redwood I attempted to leap over it, but it being very large I struck my toe against it and over I went, heels over head, falling flat on the earth. At this juncture

the red-skin's rifle pealed out. I don't know whether he fired at me or the bear, but whichever it was he seemed to have missed."

"My fall kind o' threw me off my balance. I knew the bear was at my very heels, and there was no time to be lost. But instead of rising I rolled over and pressed my body close up under the side of the great log. What possessed me to do so I don't know. At any rate, I did it without ever thinking, and the next instant here came the bear scrambling over the log right above me. In dragging its great form over, the thick, rotten bark of the redwood peeled off and came down with the bear completely burying me under it. And this saved my life, no doubt, for, covered completely over with the bark, the bear lost sight of me, but catching a glimpse of the Washoe it lunged on after him, determined not to be cheated out of a victim."

"I was so completely exhausted that I laid there perfectly quiet, my heart thumping wildly. I did not even attempt to throw off the avalanche of bark that lay over me, and it is well I didn't, for, in a few moments, I heard a scream and then a wild Indian yell. Shaking my head a little the bark settled apart so that I could see out with one eye, and to my horror I saw the Ingin in the clutches of the grizzly, while from over a little knoll beyond no less than fifty Washoes were coming to the help of their friend. But they were too late to save him. The grizzly gave him one diff and he was a good Ingin forever; but the next moment two-score arrows and bullets rattled into and against that grizzly's carcass; but they didn't down him and with a ferocious growl he charged upon his tormentors. How they did scatter! when the bear charged in one direction the reds in the other directions would turn and belt it to him with bullet and arrow. This confused Old Eph not a little, and kept him flying first one way and then the other until his hide was shot so full of holes he wasn't worth skinnin'. The desperate beast was finally compelled to yield up the fight, and to my dismay he fell dead within twenty feet of where I lay. The Ingins gathered around it with demonstrations of fiendish joy, and their proximity made me restless. You see I didn't know whether they or any of them had seen me at any time or not, but I was certain that the red that did see me was deadlier than the mother of Adam, as Old Redwood Bill would say."

"Then, again, I wasn't sure that my entire person was concealed by the bark, and if not, I was sure to be discovered, and in that case the jig'd be up with me. In a fair foot-race I'd have no fears, and once I was almost tempted to jump and run, but when I saw a savage look my way, and appear to scan the log where the bark was peeled off without showing any evident signs of surprise, I breathed easier and lay quiet as a kitten."

"I hadn't a very good view of the reds but I could see that they were in war-paint and knew it was a war-party either after white scalps or Utes, or both. They stood around the bear for quite awhile and it seemed they would never go away. To make my position all the more distressing, the bugs, ants and crickets that had been disturbed in their repose under the redwood bark began to trot over my face, creep under my collar, waltz up my shirt sleeves, dance fandangoes on my breast, pinch me here and tickle me there till it seemed I couldn't hold in. To add to this torment, no less than a hundred more Ingins came over from the north and joined those around the bear, and I'll swear they lit a fire, and skinned that bear, and cut it into slices, or the best of it, and roasted and eat bear-meat till I thought they'd burst. I was awful afraid they'd come for the bark that covered me for fuel, but as rotten bark is the poorest thing to be had to roast meat with, I s'pose that fact alone saved me."

"But I resolved that if I ever got out of that predicament alive I was going to fire that bark to git even with that million of insects that were waltzing, fighting and capering over me. My only wonder now is that a rattlesnake, or, at least, a green lizard, didn't drag its clammy length over my hands and face or invade my clothing somewhere."

"Suddenly, however, bugs and ants were forgotten in a wild, unearthly, savage yell from down the valley, and if ever you saw Ingins hustle around lively it was them Washoe gormands. The yell was the war-cry of their old enemies, the Utes, and although taken by surprise, the Washoes answered the cry and then and there began one of the fiercest Ingin battles ever fought in these hills, I expect."

"The Washoes dodged behind trees and stones and about fifty of them got behind that big red

wood log. A big buck dropped on the bark that covered me and I thought before he got off he would weigh a ton.

"For quite awhile the battle raged at long range and the way bullets and arrows whistled through the wood above me was a caution. Finally the Utes, who were in superior force, charged the Washoes. For a few moments there was a desperate hand-to-hand conflict right over that log. My big Ingin yanked a Ute over the redwood plump on top of me, and killed and scalped him right there. But the Ute were too many for the Washoes, and finally the latter were routed and away they went hotly pursued by the victorious Utes, and in a short time the scene of the conflict was transferred to other quarters. Then I flung aside my cover and sprung to my feet. I didn't stop to cremate that bug outfit, but just scattered out for tall timber. I never stopped runnin' till I was aboard of Arizona pudgin' homeward at a—"

"Hark!" suddenly exclaimed a passenger, as a strange noise fell upon his ears; "what in creation was that?"

"It was a subdued groan!" answered Judge Shannon, starting to his feet.

"And comes from the hillside above us," said Bearslayer, laying his hand upon the polished pistol-butt at his hip.

In a moment every man had sprung to his feet, and Eva and Edith, who had been listening to the Boy Hunter's story, closed the door of the coach shutting themselves in.

The party listened. They heard a rolling, crashing noise on the steep mountain-side above them as if of a gathering avalanche from out the midst of which issued cries, groans and curses as if of men engaged in mortal combat.

CHAPTER V.

AN UN CEREMONIOUS INTRUSION.

THOSE around the camp-fire stood aghast at the startling noise that had so suddenly burst upon their ears.

Loosened stones came rattling down the steep hillside, some of the larger ones bounding across the level endangering the limbs of the astounded party. The sound of those angry voices grew fainter as the volume of other sounds grew louder.

Shortly a great mass of stones, dirt and debris landed at the foot of the hill near the camp-fire enveloped in a cloud of dust that filled the air around. But this cloud quickly rose and then, to the astonishment of the party, they beheld, in the very midst of the miniature landslide and half buried under it, two white men clutched in each other's grasp, evidently engaged in a desperate combat.

The moment, however, that the dust lifted, and the light of the camp-fire lit up their surroundings, the belligerents released their hold on each other, rose to a sitting posture, and glared into each other's faces, then at the speechless party by the fire. Their faces were bruised, bleeding and covered with dust and dirt, and the look they gave each other was as ludicrous as it was contemptuous.

One of the men was a tall, angular fellow, of perhaps fifty years, dressed in the suit of a mountaineer. His lantern jaws hung apart as he sat amid the heap of dirt and stones, and glared first at his adversary, and then the passengers, in speechless surprise and confusion.

The other man was the very opposite in build, being short and stout, with a face like a full moon. This man, despite the dust and dirt upon his face, and the sad plight of his raiment, Bearslayer recognized, and in tones of surprise exclaimed:

"By gracious! that is Webfoot Mose!"

The sound of the boy's voice seemed to break the spell of silence that bound all parties speechless, and the fat man, who was indeed the Gold Hill Tramp, raised his chubby finger, and pointing at the man before him, exclaimed in a sharp, disdainful voice:

"And that thing's Redwood Bill, wild-eyed idiot of—"

"You, Goosefoot Mose!" broke in the tall man contemptuously, "blubbery mullet-head—"

"The great hunter," the fat man went on without heeding the other's interruption, "of Calaveras—the mighty, wall-eyed Ingin-slayer and scout!"

"Gentlemen," said Judge Shannon, "there seems to be some mistake here."

"There surely is," declared Bearslayer, "for that other man is Redwood Bill, the California hunter."

"There it is—there's the mistake," said Webfoot Mose as he rose to his feet and pointed to the old hunter; "there's the mistake, the blunder—that's the catastrophe!"

"Strangers," said Redwood Bill as he rose to his feet and straightened up to over six feet in his moccasins, "I'm ashamed of myself, and if you've a mule around, lead it up and let it kick me over into the promised land. I owe you folks an apology for comin' here in the company o' that big-breasted tramp. I confess it was by an accident I did so, and if you'll forgive—"

"And that accident," interposed the fat man with a grin of triumph, "was my *pheelanges* clustered around your windpipe."

"Look here, folks," said Bearslayer, "there's no need of you fellows quarreling for you're not enemies if you have made a mistake somehow or other. I know Redwood Bill there, and know he's a whole camp-meeting, while Webfoot Mose, I have seen before and mistrust he's immense."

With this explanation on the part of Bearslayer, Redwood Bill seemed fully satisfied and, turning to the fat man, said:

"Webfoot Mose, I'm glad to meet you—to know you and look upon your classic figure. I've heard o' you, tho', before."

"The same to you, Redwood," responded Webfoot extending his hand. "I've heard of you these ages, and your angelic beauty, and now that the dust and excitement are clearin' from mine eyes, and mine brain is getting clearer, I behold thine majesty and glory, oh, Redwood Bill!"

Judge Shannon had heard of both these men before but had never met them. From their general appearance, and their address, he made up his mind that they were a pair of odd, eccentric fellows. But from the manner in which they had entered camp he would have been suspicious of them had they not been identified by Bearslayer.

"Gentlemen," the judge said. "I am of the opinion that you mistook each other in the dark for an enemy and got into—"

"That's the size of it, stranger, prezactly," declared the giant, Redwood Bill. "I espied your fire here as I swung down the mountain-side and not knowin' whether you were Injins or outlaws, I began to reconnoiter. I descended the hillside on hands and knees and crept softly along until just above you here when, all to once, I was seized by that inflated bladder by the throat. He war concealed in a clump of bushes and I run bang up against him; but I reckon he can tell what he war doin' there."

"Just what you war doin'," said Webfoot Mose. "I war comin' up the pass and espied a light and, not knowing whether friend or foe was here, I tumbled gracefully up the hillside to reconnoiter. I'd reached some bushes just above you when I detected a crawling noise hard by. I made up my mind it was an Injin scout and so I threw out a skirmish line and seized him by the jugular. He responded quite vigorously and the result was I lost my plumb and rolled out of position, and we were then drawn down here by the attraction of a gravitation. Whew! it is an awful wonder that I didn't kill Bill before I discovered who he was. But, Bearslayer, I don't understand your situation here: has the road-agents been at work? What is that stage-coach doing there?"

"We're the victims of grizzly bears," said Judge Shannon.

"And now may I ask what you are doing 'way over here?" asked Bearslayer.

"I walked over here for exercise," was the unsatisfactory reply; "I think Grizzly Pass is the finest promenade this side of Jerusalem. Yes, I come over here for a little exercise."

"And you got it, too," put in Old Redwood, "comin' down that mountain-side. It's a wonder I didn't splatter you all over this pass."

"Ha! ha! ha!" laughed Webfoot, his fat sides shaking violently; "what a jolly-joker you are, Redwood. If it hadn't been for our Jack-and-Jill tumble you'd now be warming up in the tropical clime of the sinful."

"Hullo!" suddenly exclaimed Redwood, as he glanced toward the coach, "I see thar's ladies present."

Eva and Edith had opened the coach-door, and their pretty, eager faces could be plainly seen in the light of the camp-fire.

"Oh, indeed!" exclaimed Webfoot with evident confusion, glancing at the stage and then at the judge, "I hope the ladies will excuse my extravagant remarks and Old Bill's toilet."

"Oh, certainly," replied the judge with a smile.

"Bill," said the fat man in a low tone, with affected earnestness. "mebbe you'd better retire for fear your tremendous ugly face 'll frighten the ladies."

"Ruins o' destruction!" exclaimed Old Bill, "you've as much cheek as bulge. You must

think you're a beauty—a royal blue-bell with painted cheeks. Heavens! you make me weary with your lip. But say, judge," and he turned to Mr. Shannon, "you didn't give us the particulars o' your bein' stranded here; who war your ribboneer?"

"Prince John, he is called," replied the judge. "He is now off in search of the mules that got away from him when the coach upset. You see we run into a pair of grizzlies that caused our trouble. One of the passengers was killed and, but for the timely work of Bearslayer there, some of the rest of us would have met a like fate."

Eva and her cousin remained in the coach, leaving the door ajar. They had no desire for sleep now.

When all had again become silent, a general conversation ensued. The situation and surroundings were discussed by Bearslayer and Old Redwood Bill.

Meanwhile Webfoot Mose had fished a big, clubby cane from out the avalanche in which he had descended the hill, and seating himself at one side, maintained an unusual silence. But finally Judge Shannon said to him:

"I am truly surprised to see you here, Webfoot. I don't see how a man of your corporosity can get around through these hills and valleys."

"It don't surprise me, judge, for I had to come," replied Mose; "the Vigilantes gave me so much time to dust and I dusted. No, there's no room for tramps in Virginia City and Gold Hill any more."

"Oh, ho!" exclaimed Redwood Bill in evident surprise, "I begin to catch on to your true character, Webfoot. I s'posed you were only a tramp in name. So the Vigilantes fired you, eh?"

"That's exactly what they did," frankly admitted Mose; "I'm an exiled man—a wanderin' Jew—a mountain tramp."

"It's a wonder you got here alive," declared Redwood Bill, who, since he had discovered the fat man was in reality a pronounced tramp, had turned against him and addressed him with disdain and contempt, to the mortification of Bearslayer, who regarded Mose as a brave, mysterious man.

"Well, I got here in time to thumb your throat," was Webfoot's rejoinder.

"Folks," exclaimed Redwood, seeming to become exasperated by the tramp's reply, "your camp here is just as deservin' of respect as Gold Hill or Virginia City, and I advise you to issue an order of expulsion or else keep your eye on your valuables while that festive tramp is around, for he—"

"That makes me out a thief!" interrupted Webfoot Mose, his face flushed and his eyes flashing with passion; "and, sir, you've got to swaller that unless you're a better man than I be!"

"Fatty, you don't want to cork yourself so fur from fodder," retorted Redwood, in a provoking manner.

"You're either a fool or a coward, Redwood Bill!" asserted Webfoot, "and I brand you as both and defy you to resent the charge!"

"Hold, men!" cried Shannon. "I hope you will not let this lead to blows."

"Judge!" Redwood fairly roared, "I've been insulted, and that I won't take off o' one that admits he's a tramp and been driv' outen camp. I believe he's in collusion with the outlaws and's here in their interest. No, I sha'n't take that off'n him, for I'm his superior in every respect, and as I started, I'll jist slap his ears for him!"

As he concluded his speech the big hunter flung out his long arm and aimed a blow with his open hand at the side of Mose's head; but the fat man was on his guard, and brushed aside the hunter's arm in a most dexterous manner with his left hand, while his right fist shot upward and outward, and with a "spat," landed squarely on Redwood's cheek.

With a cry of surprise and pain the over-confident hunter went down under the blow as heavily as though he had been struck with a sledge-hammer, and as he again rose to his feet, half-stunned, and gazed around him in unaffected confusion, he demanded:

"What done that? Who hit me? Did you do that, Webfoot Mose?"

"Yes, and I've plenty more of the same kind when you come to time," was the tramp's cool reply.

The spectators were astounded by the sudden change in the situation and the grit and science of the fat man.

"Men, I implore you to let this trouble go no further," Judge Shannon begged, stepping between the combatants.

"All right, jedge," was the surprising reply of Redwood Bill; "I'm no hog—I know when I've got a sufficiency of enough. Webfoot Mose, it don't hurt me to be square after actin' the durned ole fool, so I'll take it all back; you're not the feller with the big muscle in front that I war thinkin' about."

"That's sufficient, Redwood," assented Webfoot, in an amicable tone. "I like you now as well as I ever did. I'm willing to be fair as an Ingin princess with a man who admits he's wrong when he's not right. I've been chased into these mountains and I'm not going to be chased out without kicking like a brindle steer. These hills and hollows are big enough for all, and as God made me and them I've a right to one little gutter anyhow, and what bugs and frogs I can eat when I catch 'em."

"Now, look here, Webfoot," expostulated Old Redwood, rubbing the rising lump on his cheek, "all that talk o' yours is clean, clear honey-fuglin'. It led me to make a fool o' myself, and you've been playin' the same on the Vigilantes. The way you show your fist about, in a man's countenance is scientific, and makes me believe you're playin' for big stakes with a full hand. I respect a man that knocks me out o' plumb for making an old insane asylum of myself, and henceforth, Webfoot, you can count on me as your twin brother."

"Shake," said Mose, and to the joy of all the trouble thus ended in favor of the tramp.

A few minutes later all were startled by a strange voice calling to them from out the darkness, and in obedience to Bearslayer's command, the stranger advanced from the shadows into the field of light.

CHAPTER VI.

SOME STARTLING SURPRISES.

THE new-comer was a man of about forty years and dressed in a miner's suit. He carried a revolver suspended to a leather belt at his right hip and a hunting-knife. Since every man found wandering alone in the mountains those days, unless well known, passed under suspicion, this man did not escape, for Webfoot Mose turned to Bearslayer and said in an undertone:

"He might be a road-agent or robber-spy."

"Or a lean tramp," replied the Boy Hunter.

Judge Shannon became spokesman for the party and at once addressed the man with several inquiries.

The stranger gave his name as Newt Gosper, and his business as a mining prospector.

"You travel late, don't you?" said Bearslayer.

"Yes, to-night," answered Gosper; "I have been prospecting off in Cedar Canyon for the past few days and struck Grizzly Pass about ten miles above here to day near sunset. What was my surprise to come suddenly upon eight harnessed mules all tangled up in a clump of bushes—"

"Indeed?" exclaimed the judge excitedly, "and where are the animals now?"

"I left them out here with your guard who sent me on to camp to make my report."

"How did you know where they belonged?" asked Bearslayer.

"I didn't; but I mistrusted they were stage mules by the harness, and knew something had happened the stage going to or coming from Virginia. I ascertained the direction the mules had come and with them took their back track. Your guard told me how they got away—a bad accident."

"Then you saw nothing of our driver, Prince John, who went in search of the mules?" queried Shannon.

"No, sir; your guard asked me about him, and since then I have been thinkin' that he might have got into trouble with Ingins or outlaws for both are in the hills. I saw a party of Utes in war-paint yesterday and that's what is hurryin' me out of these parts. But as I was going to say: a few minutes after I found the mules I heard a couple o' gun-shots fired down this way and they might have had somethin' to do with your driver's disappearance."

"That's undoubtedly so," said Redwood Bill—"possible at any rate."

"But how could Prince John fall into the power of foes and Mr. Gosper and the mules escape?" said Bearslayer.

"Oh, Mexico! that'd be easy enough. The foe that gobbled John up might 'a' turned off into a side pass and never see'd Gosper at all," answered Old Redwood.

"That's my view of the case," said Gosper, "and knowin' that there are many foes in the hills, I don't consider you very safe here, and the sooner you get away the better."

"But we have no driver," said Judge Shan-

non, "and as we have ladies in our party we cannot risk too much."

"Folks," said Gosper, "I held the ribbons on the Overland between Denver and Omaha for ten years, and I'd take a back seat for no one to-day. But while I'd advise you to git away from here immediately, I'm not beggin' the job of drivin' you into camp unless you want me to."

"Do you know the route from here on to Virginia City?" asked Shannon.

"Like a book, sir."

"What do you say, men, shall we try it?" asked Shannon.

"I'd advise you to go now—at once," said Gosper, "for any mountaineer can tell you that delay is dangerous if he knows aught of the situation."

"That's all very true," said Redwood Bill.

"I'd rather take my chances and wait for daylight before moving," said Webfoot Mose.

"I'm always trembly after night."

"I'd prefer daylight, too," said Bearslayer; "there's no more danger of a surprise here than on the go."

"But what about Prince John?" asked a passenger.

"I'll take a look for him," said Redwood Bill, "if he don't git back before you start. It'll take an hour or so to git rigged up, won't it?"

"Not twenty minutes," said Gosper, "for thar's nothin' at all broke about the harness. If nothin' happens I'll land that old hearse in camp before to-morrow's sun rises."

"Yes, if nothing happens," said Webfoot Mose in a tone that created a momentary restlessness.

"A nervous person in a crowd like this," said Redwood, determined to joke in spite of his recent experience, "furnishes ice for the marrow-bones; and yit they're a good thing whar thar are so many reckless ones—kind o' a check on their tempestuous ardor—cools 'em down—causes 'em to think afore they speak—wait till the eggs are hatched before countin' the chicks, and so forth."

Bearslayer was decidedly opposed to breaking camp before morning, but withdrew his protest in deference to the wish of the majority; but cautioned every man that possessed a weapon to see that it was in readiness for use.

By request of Gosper Mike Hogan procured the lantern belonging to the stage, lit it and held it while the new driver brought up the mules and proceeded to harness them to the vehicle.

Meanwhile Eva and Edith had alighted from the coach, the baggage was restored in its proper place and all arrangements completed for departure.

Bearslayer, after a short conversation with Shannon, went out to look for his donkey, Arizona.

Judge Shannon saw Webfoot standing off by himself, his hands resting on his cane, and walking over to him said:

"I presume you'll go in with us, Mose."

"Never, judge," was the fat man's reply.

"Why not?"

"For fear of the Vigilantes."

"Webfoot, you're no tramp."

"Thanks, judge; but you don't think I'm a prince in disguise—a millionaire—an eccentric nabob hiding away out here to escape the draft do you?"

"No, and yet I'm satisfied you're no dead beat in reality, and would like to have you accompany us. We may need your help."

"I don't know what to say," replied Webfoot in a thoughtful mood. "I don't exactly like that driver."

"What objections have you to him?"

"He's a stranger."

"Yet I believe he is honest."

"I hope so for their sake," and the fat man glanced toward the maidens.

"If you'll go back with us, Mose, I'll see that the Vigilantes let you alone. Redwood Bill can't go, as he is to look for Prince John. Here's the revolver of the man killed to-day; take it and go climb into the coach. You can take the rear seat and Sewell and I, who have occupied it all along, will ride outside with the driver. We had arranged to ride out there anyhow. Now go climb in. We will not take 'no' for answer."

With this the judge turned and walked back to camp, and Webfoot Mose sauntered after him in deep meditation.

It was finally announced that the mules were hitched up to the vehicle. Gosper climbed hurriedly into the driver's seat, gathered up the lines, and in a clear voice shouted:

"All aboard!"

Judge Shannon opened the door of the stage and assisted Edith to enter. A little cry burst

from the girl's lips as she disappeared into the black depths of the vehicle.

"What's the matter, Edith?" asked her uncle. Before the girl could reply, a wild, demoniac shout mingled with the bark of revolvers, suddenly burst upon the night.

"The outlaws—the outlaws!" roared Old Redwood Bill, at the top of his lungs.

With a cry of fear Eva Shannon sprung into the coach, and just as she did so, the mules, frightened by the horrible din, dashed away at a frightful speed, almost throwing the judge under the wheels in his vain endeavor to close the door of the stage.

And now the shrieks of the imprisoned girls, the clatter of hoofs, the rattle of the wheels, the creak of the springs, the yells of the outlaws and crack of pistols, mingled in one terrific din and started a hundred echoes rebounding like incarnate thunder through the mountains.

But the sounds made in and around the coach soon trailed off by themselves into the mountains—separating from the tumult of battle in which the outlaws and passengers engaged.

Gosper held firmly to the reins, and seemed to manage the mules with skill despite their fright and the almost-blinding darkness. But instead of turning eastward toward Virginia City he turned westward, and instead of trying to check the mules, he seemed to urge them forward, as if determined to save the maidens from the power of the mountain robbers even at the risk of being dashed to pieces by the bounding, flying coach.

In this way he had gone nearly a mile, when suddenly there was a flash before him, as if some one had quickly opened and closed a dark-lantern.

He quickly pulled up on the lines, and the stage came almost to a halt. At the same instant there was a movement and sound below, as if of some one entering the vehicle; then the mules dashed away again at the top of their speed.

And in this way the daring driver had gone perhaps half a mile further when he was suddenly startled, and the marrow in his bones almost frozen by the cold muzzle of a revolver, in the hand of some one behind him on the coach, being pressed against the side of his head, and a voice saying in his ear—the hot breath fairly scorching his cheek:

"Give me them lines, Newt Gosper, or by all the fiends you die!"

CHAPTER VII.

BEARSLAYER'S DARING ADVENTURE.

NEWT GOSPER started with a convulsive shudder. A low cry burst from his lips. Never was a man so surprised. He turned his head and glanced back over his shoulder. He could see the dim outlines of a human figure crouching on the deck of the coach above him. He realized his perilous situation. The cold tube pressing against his face seemed to paralyze his tongue.

While gazing back the head of his unknown swept athwart a patch of uncovered, moonlit sky. He caught its outlines and recognized it.

"Bearslayer, it is you!" he found speech to say.

"Yes, it is I, Bearslayer, and outlaw-killer," was the answer he received, "and now give me them lines and keep your lip buttoned or I'll scatter your brains all over this coach!"

"What do you mean, boy? why threaten me thus?" Gosper asked in a low yet excited voice.

"Why have you driven west instead of east?"

"I could not prevent it—the mules took their course before I could act—I believe there's some one on the front lead mule," chattered the driver in affected innocence.

"You know there is, curse you!" retorted the youth; "I got onto your game, you treacherous scoundrel! Them lines and jump for your life, or I'll shoot you dead where you sit!"

Gosper passed over the lines. Bearslayer took them in his left hand still holding his revolver in his right; but the removal of the cold steel from the driver's face, and his being relieved of the lines, led him to believe that his immediate danger was over, and jumping to his feet he began to feel for his pistol. But Bearslayer was not to be caught, and, quicker than a flash, he gave Gosper a blow on the side of the head that sent the man reeling from the coach with a cry of baffled rage. The youth's work, however, was but half completed for full well he knew there was a man on the near lead mule who, more than the driver, had been guiding the animals. This fact he had discovered soon after the coach dashed away.

Bearslayer's suspicions of Gosper had been stronger than he was willing to admit, and this grew upon him so that he was led into the notion

of secreting himself on the deck of the coach among some baggage, doing so before any one else had entered or mounted the vehicle. He went straight from where he had left his burro out in the defile and silently climbed to the top of the coach whose right side and top were concealed in shadows. He knew his absence would create no uneasiness or delay for he had told Judge Shannon that he would hunt up his *burro* and go on in advance of the coach.

As soon as he found himself lying flat upon the stage he began to think the situation over. He wondered what Judge Shannon and the girls would think of him could they see him lying there with all the silence and stealth of an assassin.

He finally began to regard his position and conduct as unwarranted and sneaking, if not cowardly, and at length concluded he would slip off the coach while he could do so undetected. But he was too late in arriving at this conclusion, for, just as he was about to rise, Gosper sprang into the boot and shouted his "all aboard."

In half a minute afterward the youth had reason to be thankful that he was on the coach, for as the vehicle dashed away amid the yells and firing of the outlaws, he was satisfied that Gosper's call for "all aboard" was the signal for the attack of his ambushed confederates. Whether that signal was given prematurely or not, he could not tell. Certain it was to him, however, that but three persons had entered the coach, and two of these he knew were the girls. He was not sure, however, that one of the three in the stage did not jump out as the vehicle dashed away.

That his suspicion of Gosper being in collusion with the outlaws was correct, was placed beyond doubt when he saw a man on the near lead mule virtually directing the course of the team.

The darkness in the pass was very deep, though, at times, where the pass widened and the timber was sparse, there were flashes of light that enabled Bearslayer to note the situation and act as we have seen. He had got rid of Gosper easier than he had expected, for, from the first, he made up his mind the fellow was a desperate villain, if a villain at all; but he had still the fellow on the mule to dispose of and the crisis was hastened by the outlaw discovering, despite the darkness, and rumble of wheels, and clatter of hoofs, that something was going wrong on the coach and calling out:

"What's the matter back there, Goss?"

There was no answer save the flash and report of Bearslayer's revolver.

"Cuss it, Goss! what do you mean? It's me, Limber Dave," were the excited words that followed the shot.

"I'll limber you," thought Bearslayer, and again he fired at the outlaw rider; but as before the darkness and the swaying of the coach made his aim uncertain and his bullet failed to take effect.

The next moment a revolver in the hand of the mule-rider rung out and a bullet cut close to the boy's head.

Again Bearslayer fired and again he was answered by a shot from before. Several shots were thus exchanged, but not one of them appeared to do further mischief than to excite the mules to renewed speed.

Suddenly the team came to a halt—so abrupt that the boy was almost pitched forward out of the boot. Excited voices in front of the animals were heard, and then Bearslayer knew they had been met by a party of outlaws, no doubt lying there in wait, and that he was in for a lively time.

The youth endeavored to force the mules forward, but not a step would the mob in front permit them to budge, and so dropping the lines the young dare-devil leaped to the ground, determined to open the way with his revolver. But scarcely had his feet touched the earth when he received a blow from a sledge-hammer fist that staggered him back against the coach, and before he could recover himself, he was seized from each side, hurled violently to the earth and despite his efforts, overpowered, disarmed, and made prisoner by a band of desperate mountain outlaws.

CHAPTER VIII.

WEBFOOT MOSE GETS IN SOME LIVELY WORK.

EVA SHANNON and Edith Baker were scarcely inside the coach before the yells of the outlaws rung out upon the night and the vehicle sped away into the gloom of Grizzly Pass.

Sinking into their seats the terrified maidens shrieked wildly for help, and Eva in her excite-

ment endeavored to leap from the coach. But a strong hand seized her by the arm and forced her back into her seat while the door of the coach was banged shut. Then a familiar, masculine voice greeted their ears, saying:

"Girls, don't be frightened—brave up and trust to luck."

"Eva!" cried Edith, "did you hear that? There's some one in the coach with us!"

"It's me, girls, Webfoot Moses," said the voice.

"Oh, Mose!" cried Eva, her voice scarcely audible above the noise of the flying vehicle, "what does this all mean? what is to become of us?"

"God only—knows—girls," answered Mose, as the rocking stage thrashed him from side to side.

The fat man was in a deep quandary. In entering the coach by Mr. Shannon's request he had placed himself in danger. His presence was unknown to the maidens until he spoke, for he occupied the rear seat while the girls occupied the front one. A third seat was between them, and the darkness in the coach impenetrable. The fat man had entered the stage unknown to any one. He got in from the dark side and had but just seated himself when the girls entered.

"Oh! we shall be dashed to death!" Edith Baker cried, wringing her hands in terror.

"I'll swear to man, ladies," Webfoot said, "I wish I could stop that team, but if the driver can't do it, I don't see how I can. And it would be sure death to undertake to jump out of this flying concern."

"Oh, my poor father! I shall never see him again!" moaned Eva; "the outlaws will slay him!"

"Mebby not, Miss Eva," said Webfoot, consolingly, "but I'm thinking that there is—woof! how it slams one around!—some bad work—ah!—going on with that driv—er. I believe he's an outlaw."

It was as much as the fat man could do to make himself heard and at the same time retain his seat, while the maidens were violently tossed about in their seats.

After going some distance the coach came to a sudden halt, and the hope that the driver had got the mules under control was cherished in the maidens' breasts. But they were doomed to a bitter disappointment for the stage again dashed away before one of them could utter a word. And what was most surprising was, that during the momentary stop, the door of the coach was opened from the outside, a dark form leaped into the vehicle and the door banged shut.

"Who are you?" shrieked Eva, an intuitive fear seizing upon her mind, as some one brushed against her.

There was no reply to her inquiry, but instantly the blinding rays of a dark-lantern were flashed into the girls' faces by the intruder who had seated himself on the middle seat.

"Have no fears, my dear girls," a strange, cold, cruel voice said, "this is only a romantic adventure peculiar to the wild, wild West. I assure you no harm shall befall you. We know you are the ladies of Judge Shannon, whose mines are turning him out a fortune every day. In due course of time the judge will have an opportunity to ransom you. Meanwhile, you shall be honored guests in the stronghold of Cuba Kidd. We will soon leave this old coach for the saddle."

"So that's your game, is it, my dashing mountain bandit?"

It was Webfoot Mose who spoke from the darkness behind the outlaw, and if ever a man made a quick movement it was that bandit. He turned on his seat, and as he fumbled for a weapon, he endeavored to flash his lantern upon Mose's face; but the fat tramp was on the alert, and seizing the villain by the throat to prevent him crying out, jerked him violently over the seat.

A silent struggle then ensued that filled the maidens' hearts with a new, agonizing terror. The outlaw gasped and wheezed for breath, and in his struggle he held on to his lantern which, in its lightning-like changes, threw its bars of light around the inclosure in dizzy, blinding flashes.

Not a word did the fearless Webfoot utter, though he panted like a worried, overgrown ox. Not a word could the cunning bandit utter, for his vocal apparatus was in a giant grip.

In the narrow limits of the coach—in the darkness, with the vehicle rocking and swaying violently, it was a death-struggle from which it seemed impossible for either of the combatants to escape death or injury.

In dire suspense, in breathless terror the maidens sat trembling in each other's arms, ex-

pecting every instant to see the flash and hear the murderous report of a pistol.

The outlaw finally dropped his lantern, and then the silent conflict seemed to become all the more desperate. The girls heard the gasping of one, and the heavy panting of the other of the combatants. No violent blows were struck, although the booted feet of the outlaw pounded furiously against the side of the coach.

Thus the struggle continued for several moments though they seemed hours to the maidens.

Finally it seemed to grow less furious and gradually ceased altogether. But who was the victor? Before this could be determined by the maidens the crack of a pistol on the coach outside rung out.

"Oh heavens!" cried Edith, "just listen to that outside!"

"Something's awry out there." It was Webfoot Mose who spoke thus as if nothing whatever had just happened within.

"Oh, Mose!" cried Eva joyfully, "thank the Lord, you are alive! Are you hurt, Moses?"

"No, not the least bit that ever was," was the cool reply.

"But what of the outlaw, Moses?"

"Heavens!" exclaimed the fat tramp, heeding not the girl's question, "there's a regular shooting-matinee going on out there! That part of it I don't understand unless our folks have caught up with the coach and are peppering the driver full of holes—hullo! we've come to a stop again. Wonder if it's to take somebody else aboard? I'll peep out, anyhow."

He opened the door on the right and looked out. It was dark as Egypt and he could see nothing; but he could hear angry, excited voices in front of the team and on the opposite side of the coach.

An idea flashed into the tramp's brain and turning to the girls he said in a whisper:

"Come, girls, let's jump out and run. I am sure the way's clear on this side. The outlaws seem to be quarreling among themselves—the iron's hot and let's strike—come."

As he finished speaking he arose and crowding his bulky form through the door stepped to the ground. Eva and Edith followed him quickly, silently.

Excited voices and the sound of a scuffle could be heard on the other side. The mules were rearing and plunging in the harness, and the man in charge cursing furiously.

Grasping each of the girls by a hand the gallant tramp waddled briskly away with them without caring as to the course he was going, so that it took them away from the vicinity of the outlaws.

Thus had Bearslayer and Webfoot performed deeds of daring outside and in the coach without the slightest knowledge of each other's presence.

When about twenty rods from the stage the three fugitives stopped to listen. They heard the outlaws speaking in loud, excited tones. They heard one of them say:

"Curse him! we'll make him pay for this!"

"I wonder who they mean?" whispered Mose. "If it's me, they'll get precious little pay, for I'm financially suspended—I'm busted. Hullo! there goes a light!"

True enough, a light was flashed into the coach, and an instant afterward a voice raved out:

"Great thunder and furies! there's no one in the coach but a dead man! The girls are gone, and—By Heavens! the dead man is Denver Pete!"

Eva and Edith shuddered, for this told them that Webfoot Mose had slain his antagonist.

"Whist!" suddenly ejaculated Mose, as a hasty footstep was heard approaching.

A man, breathing heavily, passed near them at a run, going in the direction of the outlaws.

"Smotheration!" said Mose, "I hope it wasn't any of our folks!"

His fears of this, however, were dispelled when the footman, reaching the stage, was heard to ask:

"Have you got that young demon, boys?"

To this was given the reply:

"Why, Gosper, what does this mean?"

"That sly young devil," Gosper replied, "got onto the hearse some way, and pulled his iron on my jaw, and I had to deliver up the ribbons; then he knocked me overboard."

"Well, Goss, we've got the young vampire, and don't you neglect to remember that we'll make him smoke," was the response.

"Strangulation!" exclaimed Webfoot Mose; "some one of our friends is in the bandits' power, and I'm afraid it's that brave boy, Bearslayer. Girls, I believe I'll go back there, and—"

"No, no, Moses!" begged Eva, clinging to the man's arm; "you must not leave us. There are many of them there, and you could do nothing. Stay with us. You must not leave us!"

"Just as you say, girls," Mose replied. "I couldn't turn a deaf ear to your pleadings, though I would like to know who it is them villains have, and destroy a few of the wretches. So let's be moving along. I think this is the way that leads back toward the camp we left so unceremoniously."

"But instead of leading us to friends it may lead us to enemies," said Edith.

"I'm thinking, girls," said Mose, "that the outlaws got flaxed out in their attack on our friends."

"Oh! I hope so!" said Eva.

Webfoot led the way through the gloom and soon they were out of hearing of the enraged outlaws; but it finally became evident to the fat man that they were not following Grizzly Pass but a deep, dark defile that trended off toward the northeast. He said nothing of this to his fair *protégées*, but continued on slowly, fearing to undertake to retrace his steps not knowing what new dangers might be encountered.

The girls placed implicit confidence in their rescuer. He had shown himself to be a brave and fearless man notwithstanding the name he bore. He was always cool and self-possessed, he seemed fully conscious of the magnitude of the surrounding dangers.

After traveling along an hour or two, Eva asked:

"Is it not time we were back to our old camp, Mose?"

Seeing he could truthfully keep the fact of their being lost from the girls no longer, Webfoot replied:

"We've traveled far enough, Miss Eva, but I guess we've missed Grizzly Pass entirely and are rambling off in a side canyon; but I expect it's all the better for us."

This news created a feeling of despondency in the breasts of the girls, but the assurances of their brave friend revived their spirits and they trudged on.

Finally Webfoot concluded they were out of reach of immediate danger and called a halt. He selected a secluded place under a cluster of pines and bade the girls be seated and rest while he stood guard.

Here they passed the remainder of that eventful night, and it was with a feeling of supreme joy that they finally beheld the morning sun gilding the mountain peaks and heard the twitter and song of birds.

The fat man could now see that they were not in Grizzly Pass, but a narrow, winding defile on either side of which rose mighty hills in places covered with tall, dark pines.

The want of sleep and food, and the fear and excitement of the night, had blanched the fair faces of the maidens and filled their hearts with sadness and gloom. But Webfoot Mose was the same; if any difference, he was more cheerful and his step was more elastic.

To the maidens of Gold Hill, Tramp had become a hero—a brave and fearless man whose ungainliness of figure was lost sight of entirely in the gallantry of his brave and undaunted spirit, in the kindness of his great heart, and the pleasant, boyish expression of his big eyes and round fat face.

The trio began their morning tramp quite early, and now, Webfoot realized that they had not the friendly cover of night to hide them and that greater caution must be observed. After going a short ways he stopped suddenly, sniffed the air like a beagle and said:

"Seems to me I smell burning pine."

"I thought so, too, awhile ago," said Edith Baker.

"It may be from the camp-fire of friends, and it may be that of foes," Mose said; "and I presume we'd better make a reconnaissance. Friends we're anxious to meet, but foes we want to elude. Suppose we ascend this hillside, girls, and like Moses of old, view the landscape o'er?"

"Where ever you lead we will follow, Mose," Eva said; "you are our guide and protector."

"An honor to me, I assure you," the fat man said proudly.

They turned and entering a goat-path began the ascent of the hill that was covered with a dense growth of small pine trees. The path was worn deep in the hillside, and it was about all Webfoot could do to crowd his bulky frame through in places.

The path did not run straight up the acclivity but angled off to the left, and about two hundred feet from the valley it reached a ledge of rocks that wound around the hillside like a spiral stair. On the lower side this ledge went

abruptly off into an acclivity of many feet, while on the upper the hill rose perpendicular, its facade being covered with bushes and vines. From the lower side tall pines thrust their stately heads above the rock thus making a narrow lane or avenue walled in on one side with green tree-tops and the other with the emerald festoonery of the hillside.

As soon as they had reached the ledge, Webfoot stopped, drew a long breath of relief, removed his hat that the cool balmy breeze might fan his brow upon which stood great beads of perspiration, and exclaimed:

"Land of love! behold what a lovely spot this is, girls! This path is the avenue that leads upward to fairyland, surer'n creation. S'pose we go on to that sublime realm? Wouldn't I cut a beautiful figure there?" and he indulged in a silent laugh that forced a smile to the maidens' sad faces.

"You are rather hard on yourself, Mose," Eva said.

"Well, joking aside," he observed, as he cast his eyes across the valley through an opening in the tree-tops. "I'll die a skeleton if I don't see smoke rising above the trees away over yonder. Look right through here, girls, and see if you can't see it, too."

He pointed off across the valley and toward a wooded vale that entered the main defile at right angles, from which all could distinctly see a thin column of blue smoke rising lazily upon the air.

"Do you think friends are there, Mose?" Eva asked eagerly.

"I hope so, but I can't say sure; and I must make sure before I go further. Girls, I'm going to leave you right here and skip over there and see whose camp-fire that is. Do you remain here until I return or send for you."

"Oh, do be careful, Mose!" Eva said in an anxious tone.

"That I will, girls," the man responded; "my bump of self-preservation is enormously developed, and I'll take care of Webfoot Mose."

With this he turned and began the descent of the hillside.

"What a brave, kind, queer fellow he is," said Edith as he disappeared from their sight.

"I don't believe he's a tramp, do you, Edith?" asked Eva.

"It is a fortunate thing for us that the Vigilantes thought he was," responded Edith philosophically.

And thus the two maidens conversed for nearly an hour. They had begun to look for Webfoot's return, and were expressing the hope of soon being delivered from their peril when they were suddenly startled with terror by the appearance before them of an Indian warrior decked out in all the savage paraphernalia of the war-path!

CHAPTER IX.

BEARSLAYER A PRISONER.

WHEN Bearslayer found himself a prisoner he became more uneasy about the fate of Eva and Edith than himself; but when the outlaw that looked in the coach announced it empty, with the exception of the dead body of Denver Pete, he breathed freer. He knew at once that some one else besides the girls had entered the vehicle at camp, and that it was his hand that had slain the outlaw and by his help the girls had escaped. But he could not imagine who that person was, and of all those he had met at camp, Webfoot Mose was the last one he would have thought of in connection with such a daring feat.

Newt Gosper, the deposed driver, coming up could throw no light upon the mysteries of the interior of the coach, but he could describe in glowing language what had occurred outside. He became so worked up over the subject that but for the intervention of his friends he would have wreaked bloody revenge on the now helpless author of his broken head.

The outlaws had use for Bearslayer alive. They felt sure that he could enlighten them as to the death of Denver Pete and the escape of the girls, and this information they resolved to have at all hazards. They also suspected treachery in their own ranks for, so carefully had their plans been laid for the abduction of Judge Shannon's daughter that they thought it impossible for so disastrous an outcome to have resulted from any other cause than the bad faith of some one of their band. And if this was true, they had hopes of detecting the traitor through the Boy Hunter.

Before they had put any questions to the youth, however, a party of half a dozen mounted friends came galloping up the pass and joined them. With this party was their leader, the notorious Captain Cuba Kidd, who, springing

from his saddle as he drew rein, eagerly inquired:

"Well, boys, how have our plans worked?"

"Not at all—they're a gigantic failure—we've been outgeneraled, and flanked, and beaten at every point," answered one of the men.

"What do you mean, Elder Joe?" asked the outlaw chief.

"I mean that Bearslayer, the Boy Hunter, got onto the hearse and knocked Goss heels over head; some one got into the coach and killed Denver Pete and escaped with the girls. All we've left out of the reck is the festive Bearslayer."

The outlaw captain cursed and swore like a mad demon. He shared with his men in the belief that their defeat had been accomplished through treachery, and turned to Bearslayer and demanded an explanation. But he soon found that the Boy Hunter was determined upon silence despite his blustering threats of violence.

"Never mind, a rope round his neck and slung over a limb 'll loosen his tongue, maybe, captain," said an outlaw.

"Humph!" ejaculated the bandit chief, "it hasn't been a week since them masked Vigilantes, masquerading as road-agents, undertook that game in the boy's own cabin and failed. But then when he sees we are in earnest perhaps he'll come to time. There's no fooling about our work this time."

"No compromise with villains is my motto," declared the helpless boy, defiantly.

"Well, we'll see about that," said the captain; "but, men, we must not tarry here longer. Them fellows will be along here presently. They've got that bloody old Redwood Bill to help them out."

"Did you down any of the passengers, captain?"

"Not that we know of, although I tried hard to wing Old Redwood when I found he was there. We lost two men in the attack, and expect if we'd showed ourselves every dog of us would have been shot. So you see our part—attracting attention while the coach escaped, was the only part successfully carried out. Tie up them mules to a tree and let us get away from here forthwith, but keep a hand and eye on that Bearslayer."

The outlaws hurriedly made arrangements for departure. The mules were tied up to a tree, Bearslayer was placed upon the back of a horse, whose owner had doubtless been among the slain of that night, and securely tied thereon. Then the party separated and moved away, the horseman continuing on up the pass and the footmen cutting across the hills.

Daylight found the horsemen with their captive many miles from the scene of the night's adventure over in the fastnesses of the mountains.

The footmen had not yet joined them. In fact, they had been sent back away from Grizzly Pass to elude discovery, await the coming of day and then make such reconnaissance as might enable them to secure the girls or, at least, determine their whereabouts. In case they were successful in the first instance, they were to meet the captain and his party at their designated bivouac; but should they need assistance a messenger was to be dispatched there.

"Cuba" Kidd and his band had long set their hearts upon securing a fortune through the capture of Judge Shannon on his passage to or from Virginia City; but when they learned through their spies in camp that on his return from the east, via San Francisco, he would be accompanied by his daughter, a lovely girl whom he idolized, they changed their plans in that the daughter instead of the judge should be abducted and held for ransom. So carefully and systematically had they planned their work that they knew to the very day when the coach, bearing the judge and his daughter to the famous camp, would pass through Grizzly Pass. Within five miles of where the stage was stopped by the bears, the attack was to have been made; but that accident produced a hitch in all their well-conceived plans, and so the bandits were compelled to adopt another course which resulted, as we have seen, rather disastrously. And to the outlaws it seemed impossible for the judge and his friends to have brought about this disaster without a previous knowledge of their movements. How this knowledge was obtained, Cuba Kidd now determined to ascertain and, turning to Bearslayer who lay upon the earth in bonds, said:

"Young man, I want you to tell me this morning how you learned of our movements last night."

"We guessed at them," was the lad's reply.

"Boy, I want none of your impertinence,"

thundered the outlaw in a tone calculated to carry conviction; "I've had enough of it. You thwarted me in your cabin a few nights ago, and I shall not be again. Understand that! Some one divulged our plans to you last night, and—"

"You're mistaken, old man," said Bearslayer fearlessly; "the trouble is you fellows didn't know our plans. If you'd sent a less suspicious lookin' critter to camp with them mules than that sneakish Gosper you might have got the drop on all of us. But, if I am a boy, I can tell pretty well when I meet a villain just by his actions. No, you needn't lay your defeat to treachery 'mong your followers."

"Who killed Denver Pete in the coach after it left camp?" Kidd asked, "and spirited them women off?"

"I do not know."

"You lie!"

"I would not tell you if I knew," the lad declared.

"Men, bring a rope!" commanded "Cuba," "and we'll see what we can do for the brat, if it's nothing more than to make food for coyotes of him. I'm tired of this impertinence and bravado."

Newt Gosper hurried off to where the horses were hitched, and procured a lariat, eager to repay the young bear-killer for the blow he had given him the night before.

Bearslayer was made to stand up. A noose on one end of the rope was placed around his neck, and the other end thrown over the limb of a tree under which he stood.

"Now, young man," said Captain Cuba, "you can make up your mind to tell what we desire to know, or take a last look at the morning sun and the peaks of the Sierras. Understand, this is no farce, but a business proceeding."

As the outlaw spoke, Bearslayer fixed his eyes upon him with a look of defiance and scorn.

The outlaws, six in all, now gathered around the boy, eager to see him hang or hear him speak.

The party was in a deep, narrow ravine under a clump of pine trees. Above them the defile was choked up with a dense growth of underbrush and vines; below them the way was open to the main canyon, into which the defile debouched. The steep hills that rose on either side were covered with bushes and stunted pines. The spot was a lonely, dismal one in which to die, for this Bearslayer had made up his mind to do, rather than concede one thing to the outlaws.

At the time the rope was adjusted the youth's hands and feet were tied, but seeing this, Cuba said:

"Untie his feet so that we can see him kick, and his hands, so that, at any time before he becomes unconscious and yet cannot speak, he can motion with his hands should he conclude to communicate with us. You understand that, do you, Bearslayer?"

"I do, sir," answered the defiant youth.

The bonds were severed.

"Do you still refuse to talk?" again asked Cuba Kidd. "Think now of what you're doing."

"I defy you!" was the boy's reply.

"Pull him up easy, boys," commanded the outlaw chief.

Gosper and a companion began pulling down upon the rope, and Bearslayer's toes were nearly clear of the ground, when there was heard a "zip" and a "thud," and with a sharp cry of agony Gosper let go the rope, and falling to the earth rolled and floundered as if in mortal pain, clutching frantically at his face.

The feathered shaft of an arrow, that was buried deep in the right eye of the outlaw, told the cause of his agony.

Cuba Kidd and his men quickly glanced in the direction whence they knew the weapon came. They saw a form on the hillside above them flitting among the bushes.

"Run him down, men!" cried Cuba Kidd; "slay him, for he has wounded Gosper to death!"

Two of the men glided away after the unknown whose arrow had put a stop, for the time being, to the execution of Bearslayer.

Cuba turned to the assistance of Gosper. He endeavored to draw the barbed weapon from the man's eye, but so agonizing was the pain that the wretch went into convulsions, and in half a minute was dead.

All this time that Captain Cuba was busy elsewhere, one of the outlaws held on to the rope around Bearslayer's neck with one hand, while with the other he grasped a revolver.

But for this latter fact the boy would have made a dash for liberty, but his custodian seemed to have read the thought in the youth's mind

and watched him closely. But even while Cuba Kidd lingered over the form of the dying Gosper, a noise in the bushes up the canyon caused Bearslayer's guard to look around, and as he did so, he saw a huge grizzly emerge from the thicket not over thirty feet from where they stood, stop and look at them in surprise.

"A grizzly, by heavens!" burst from the fellow's lips, and, filled with that sudden fear which is inspired by the first sight of one of those ferocious, shaggy monsters, and which leads to a panic, the man raised his revolver and fired at the animal.

Bearslayer, who had, also, seen the bear, endeavored to prevent the man firing for he knew too well the result of such an act; but his warning came too late—the pistol cracked, the bullet struck the bear which uttered a fierce growl and charged upon them.

"Run, for your lives!" yelled Captain Cuba with an oath, breaking for the nearest tree, "and may the devil take the infernal brute!"

Bearslayer and his custodian dashed away side and side the latter holding on to the rope around the lad's neck. These two the bear followed, and although they had several yards the start the beast gained rapidly upon them.

Reaching a tree with low boughs the outlaw started up into its friendly heights with remarkable celerity, still endeavoring to hold on to the rope. But now was Bearslayer's opportunity, and he had the presence of mind to improve it. As the outlaw sprang for the tree the youth deftly snatched the villain's knife—a long-bladed hunting-knife—from its sheath at his hip, and with a single stroke severed the rope around his neck, then bounded on alone; and not alone, either, for the grizzly followed close at his heels.

Bearslayer realized that his situation was as dangerous as that of his vaunted foes was ridiculous. He might have sprung into a tree and eluded the bear, but this would not have placed him out of reach of other dangers, for the outlaws from their perch in the pines might take it into their heads to pick him off with their revolvers—useless weapons against the bear.

But when out of reach of the outlaws the boy found himself out of the immediate vicinity of tree or bush, with the bear at his very heels. Less than half a minute was left him in which to act, and well did he improve this time. A deer path, that had been worn out a foot deep and nearly two wide by the action of the water, lay before him. Into this he flung himself face upward, the outlaw's knife grasped in his hand.

The grizzly rushing on madly could not check itself before reaching the ditch, and was carried by its momentum across the prostrate form of the boy. But it passed over him as it was coming to a stop, and with the quickness of lightning Bearslayer drove his knife upward into the animal's body to the guard and with a backward sweep of the blade laid the belly open half its length.

With a howl that fairly shook the hills the great bear half-curved himself on the earth, and in his agony tore at his entrails that fell from the cavity of the body with his teeth and paws.

Yells from the outlaws in the trees greeted the boy's fearless and desperate act, and Cuba Kidd leaping to the ground began firing at the grizzly with his revolver. But the bear was not as near dead as he had supposed, and starting up, it dashed back toward the villain with more than half its entrails trailing out upon the ground.

Quickly the outlaw scrambled back into the tree, while Bearslayer, springing to his feet, ran swiftly in the direction of the outlaws' horses. Two shots were fired after him from the trees, but he soon had gained the cover of one of the horses, and was about to unfasten it with the intention of mounting and fleeing, when he espied hanging to another saddle his own trusty "bear-rifle" and cartridge-belt, which the enemy had found on the coach. With this discovery, he quickly changed his mind, and securing the rifle and belt he turned his attention to the outlaws and the bear.

The latter had laid down under the tree in which Cuba Kidd and one of his men had taken refuge and to all appearance was in the last throes of death. But its presence there was enough to hold the two outlaws at bay, but the third one, who was a few paces further down the canyon, was hastily descending from his roost, when the deadly rifle of the young hunter rung out and with a shriek the villain lost his hold on the tree and fell dead to the ground.

At the sound of the gun the bear never moved. It was dead.

A grim smile of triumph now lit up the face of the young hunter, and, stepping out into

plain view of the other two outlaws, he raised his rifle, and in a clear, ringing voice shouted out:

"Captain Cuba Kidd, it's my turn now, and unless you surrender at once I'll drop you from that tree as though you were a panther!"

CHAPTER X.

WHAT WEBFOOT'S RECONNOISSANCE REVEALED.

EVA SHANNON and Edith Baker were fairly paralyzed with terror at sight of the Indian that had appeared before them, as silently as though he had dropped from the clouds. They started back, their faces blanched, and their white lips voiceless.

The Indian showed by his actions that he himself was surprised by the presence of the maidens, and after gazing at them for a few moments, to make sure they were not visions of loveliness, that would disappear at the utterance of a sound, he grunted out in good English:

"Ugh! white squaw."

The savage was a young man with a slender, supple form, and a movement like that of a panther. He was armed with a bow, which he carried in his hand, and a well-filled quiver that was slung at his shoulder. In his girdle was a knife.

To his ejaculation the girls made no reply. They were so frightened they could not speak. This the Indian saw, and laying down his bow, he held up his hands, palms outward, in token of friendship, saying:

"White squaws need no be afraid. Little-Fox no make war on squaws—he pale-face friend—Washoe scout. Let pale-face squaws speak."

He said this so plain, and in such apparent honesty, that the girls had a great burden lifted from their minds, and Eva then mustered courage to say:

"Oh! we are so glad you are our friend!"

The Indian lowered his hand, and his painted face relaxed into a natural expression. Stooping, he picked up his bow, and advancing a step nearer the girls, asked:

"What white squaw do here?"

"We were left here by a friend," replied Eva.

"Where come from?"

Eva told him.

The Indian glanced quickly around him and said:

"There bad Ingins in hills—bad Utes—bad pale-face, too—white squaw not safe there."

"We know it, Little-Fox," the fair Eva responded; "our friend went to investigate a smoke he saw 'way over yonder. He will be back soon and then we will move on in search of our friends. I wish you could tell us where to find them."

"Don't know," the Indian answered with a shake of his head.

Thus they conversed for several minutes when suddenly the Indian started, fixed his eyes on something on his right, and then exclaimed:

"Waugh! what that?"

Looking in the direction indicated the maidens saw Webfoot Mose advancing toward them along the ledge, his hand upon his revolver, and his eyes upon the Washoe.

"That is our friend!" said Eva, and despite the gravity of their situation the maidens could not repress a smile at the surprise and curiosity manifested by the red-skin's question.

"Ugh! he heap big bosom," said the Indian, laying his hand upon his stomach.

"Hullo, girls! who's that you've captured?" was Webfoot's first remark as he approached.

"His name is Little-Fox," answered Eva; "he says he is a Washoe scout, and a friend of the pale-faces."

"How?" exclaimed the red-skin, extending his hand in friendly salutation.

"Well, thank you; how's Little-Fox?" responded Webfoot advancing and grasping the Indian's hand in a strong grip.

"You heap big eat," said the Indian, scanning the corpulent figure of Mose from head to foot, as though he were an animal on exhibition.

The girls could scarcely conceal their mirth, while Webfoot, himself, was not a little amused at the red-skin's curiosity.

"Yes, red-skin, I used to have a good appetite," Mose answered, "but seems like an age since I've tasted food. I'm wasting away to a mere skeleton. But say, Little-Fox, what's the news? Do you know there's a whole nest of Ute Indians camped over yonder?"

"Yes—Ute dogs there," replied the savage pointing away across the valley, "horse-tracks go that way," and he pointed in another direction—"Little-Fox go see where go—who them are?"

"And when you find out will you come back and tell us?" asked Webfoot. "They may be our friends and if so we are frightful glad for them to find us for they're lost if they're friends."

"Little-Fox come back—he friend of pale-face. You wait here?"

"Yes, right here," answered Mose.

"Then watch out heap for Uto—he sneak like wolf," cautioned the Friendly as he turned and departed.

"That's a bit of good-luck striking that red-skin," said Webfoot, "for I unders and he's a sworn friend to the whites, a personal friend of Bearslayer, and a famous scout. But, girls, I don't want to scare you, but there's no less than a hundred Utes over yonder and they're hostile, too. But if we keep till here till that Washoe gets back we'll get away from them. So be patient and brave as you have been, and all will be well."

After conversing awhile with the maidens Webfoot walked out to the end of the ledge from whence he could command a view of the goat-path leading down into the valley. He had stood there but a few moments when he caught a glimpse of a stealthy figure among the trees below. He started back and glanced around him. His eyes fell upon a great rock lying half hid among the drooping vines at the upper side of the ledge. With another cautious glance into the valley the fat tramp turned and hastening to the rock laid hold of it, and summoning all his strength, succeeded in moving it out into the middle of the ledge.

The maidens saw him and, filled with curiosity, arose and advanced to where he sat upon the rock, great beads of perspiration rolling down his face, his hat off, and the wind toying with his thin, flaxen locks.

Before either of the girls could speak he put his fingers to his lips significant of silence, and shook his head.

A look of fear whitened the faces of the girls and stopping they stood silent before their friend.

"I don't know," said Webfoot, leaning forward and speaking just above a whisper, "but what there's some one at the foot of the hill trying to follow our trail, and if it's an enemy, and he undertakes to come up here, I'll bat him on the head with this stone as sure as I'm a mountain 'tourist.'"

The girls could see that he was uneasy despite the manner in which he spoke, for he at once arose and creeping back to the end of the ledge cautiously peered down the *cimmaron* path.

In a moment he turned and hurried back and again laid hold of the stone and began working it toward the spot where the ledge dropped off so suddenly into the goat-path. He labored with all his might and when at length he had reached the edge of the ledge he was almost out of breath. But he did not stop to rest, but glanced down the path, uttered an exclamation of surprise, which was answered by a subdued savage war-whoop, then bending over the rock again he rolled it off the ledge and sent it bounding down the path.

Four Ute savages were ascending the hillside evidently upon the trail of the fat man. They were following one behind another in the goat-path and, unaware of the deadly trap the white man was setting for them, they glided up the hill. But suddenly they saw the great stone leap over the ledge and come bounding toward them following the depression worn by the hooved feet of the mountain sheep. The foremost red-skin leaped out of its way, but the others were struck down and crushed to death in a twinkling, their bodies scarcely checking the deadly missile in the least.

On down the hill swept the great stone, landing in the valley with a sullen boom, while a cloud of dust rose upon its track and drifted away upon the breeze.

The escaped red-skin glanced at the crushed and mangled bodies of his comrades lying quivering in the path, then with a cry of baffled rage he bounded off down the hill. But he had hesitated a moment too long, for he had gone but a few steps ere the revolver in the hand of Webfoot Mose rung out, the bullet struck him on the back of the neck and he plunged headlong down the steep hill lifeless.

As the report of the weapon rolled in prolonged echoes through the hills, Webfoot's brows contracted, and with a dissatisfied look he growled:

"Smother me! that pistol-shot's a bad job. It will be heard clear up to British Columbia; but I had to do it. There's one thing certain, though; we can leave here, Washoe or no

Washoe, and since we've been paddling our own canoe pretty well since we disembarked from that old coach I guess we can continue to do so. Let's follow this ledge on around and see where it does lead to."

The girls were only too glad to be moving, and the trio at once started off along the ledge, Webfoot Mose leading the way.

They had gone perhaps half a mile when turning the abrupt angle of a great rock Mose found himself face to face with a white man.

Both started back in surprise. The hand of each involuntarily sought a weapon of defense; at the same instant the stranger's face lighted up with a smile of recognition, and he said:

"Webfoot Mose, as I live!"

"Yes, sir, I'm that tourist," replied the fat man; "and if I'm not mistaken, you are Daniel Florrin, whom I have met more'n once in the salons of Gold Hill."

"Exactly," replied the man, with a low laugh, glancing restlessly across the valley.

Eva and Edith had not yet come in sight of the man, for the angle of the rock concealed him, nor could they see him when they finally stopped a few paces behind Mose to hear what the men were saying.

At the sound of Florrin's voice Edith Baker started as if suddenly aroused from a frightful dream, and when the man spoke in a clearer tone her face turned deathly pale, her eyes stared wildly, and her bloodless lips parted as if to speak. She clung nervously to Eva for support, and finally, with a moaning gasp, sunk unconscious to the earth!

CHAPTER XI.

CUBA KIDD HAS TO COME DOWN.

As Bearslayer's demand for Captain Cuba Kidd's surrender fell upon that worthy's ear, his jaws dropped apart and he glanced at his friend in the tree before him, his face the very picture of baffled rage. Both the outlaws held their revolvers in their hands, but the young dare-devil, who had so suddenly turned the tables upon them, was over a hundred yards away, ensconced behind a tree, with his own unerring rifle in hand. He could shoot them both while descending to the ground, and figure the matter out as they might, the result was the same—they were at the boy's mercy.

"Surrender, old cappies!" the young hunter again demanded, seeing they hesitated, "or I'll give no quarter. Remember, that it'll be shot for shot from this on."

"Captain, the young hellion has got us foul," said Kidd's companion in a woful voice.

"It's a most humiliating position, Dug, for men that occupied the place we did a few minutes ago," said the robber chief, a look of abject misery upon his dark, "piratical" face.

"Ghost of Lazarus!" exclaimed the man "Dug"; "if the boys that went in pursuit of Gosper's slayer would only return now and take that sardonic youth from behind, you and I, captain, might think this wasn't such a bad world after all."

"Ten to one Gosper's slayer was a Washoe savage," said Kidd, "and, that he'll draw Nick and Tiger-Tooth into a death-trap. It begins to look as though we were doomed. Out of twenty men that started into the Shannon-Abduction scheme half are already dead and—"

"But, don't you see, the 'divy' 'll be all the greater, captain?" interrupted the cold-blooded wretch on the limb before him; "fifty thousand divided among ten men's better than 'mongst twenty."

"Well, man! but you're a cool one," declared Captain Cuba. "You talk as though we had the girl in our power and the gold was on the way for her ransom, instead of our sitting here like a pair of grinning apes liable to be shot down dead at any instant. Hear that? does that sound much like our doing a banking business on Shannon's gold?"

It was Bearslayer's voice again demanding their surrender that led to the bandit's facetious interrogative.

"Let's parley with the murderous young scamp in hopes of gainin' time till Nick and Tiger-Tooth can come to our relief," said the cunning Dug Tarr.

"You've the brain-fertility of a Napoleon, Dug," said Kidd, "and I'll try your scheme though it may cost us our lives."

"There'll be that much more for the other boys on the divy if we are sacrificed in the cause," was Dug's reply.

Cuba Kidd could not repress an oath at the man's reckless bravado; then turning his head he shouted to Bearslayer:

"What more do you want? don't you see

we're at the mercy of the bear and your cowardly self?"

"Don't be afraid of that bear, Mr. Kidd," returned the boy in the most aggravating way, "for he's dead as you'll be in about fourteen seconds 'less you surrender. If the bear's all that keeps you up there like a pair of 'possums, just try to get down without my permission—just make one shadow of an attempt. I want an excuse to plug you two. Oh, you royal mountaineers! I've got the drop on you this time. I expect it makes you hot but I can't help it. I'm a little lord of all I survey—and that's you bold, bad buccaneers—and I want you fellows to be dignified about your surrender."

"You infernal whelp!" exclaimed Kidd, "do you want us to give up and set here like warts on these limbs till we rot?"

"No, not exactly," replied their young tormentor, "but each of you have a pistol in your hand. I want you to drop them—toss them out this way."

The discomfited outlaws looked at each other, spoke in a low tone, and then tossed their revolvers to the ground.

"There, that's very nicely did," shouted Bearslayer, "but you'll next unbuckle your belts and fling them down. You might have another shooter there."

"We have not," was Dug Farr's reply.

"Well, throw them down anyhow," ordered the boy.

The belts were thrown to the ground.

"Got anything dangerous in your pockets?" Bearslayer demanded.

"A jack-knife," answered Dug Tarr.

"Drop it," commanded the youth.

The knife was dropped.

"Got any thing else?"

"No," Captain Kidd answered.

"Then one of you climb down and advance into the opening yonder with your hands above your head," said Bearslayer. "Remember now, only one at a time; and I want him to get down slowly, and with the fear of the Lord in his heart. Any hasty movement will be to invite a shot from me. Steady now."

Dug Tarr began to descend, a sinister gleam in his eyes. Captain Cuba whispered something to him as they parted. The boy knew, by their very actions, that they had some suddenly conceived scheme on foot.

Tarr soon passed the last limb and in "craw-fishing" down the trunk he edged around so as to place the tree between him and the boy. But the pine was too small to cover the villain's entire body and Bearslayer called out:

"Say, old horse, if you think you're safe just say so and I'll show you how easy I can shoot a lung or bust a shoulder for you."

With apparent reluctance the man stepped from behind the tree and advanced into the opening indicated.

"Ugh!"

It was a low, guttural ejaculation that fell upon Bearslayer's ears. It came from behind him.

Quick as a flash the startled youth turned his head and saw an Indian warrior standing near him, a triumphant gleam in his eyes. Two reeking human scalps hung at his girdle.

"Ahl it Little-Fox, the WasLoe," the boy said.

"Yes—look!" responded the Indian, pointing from one to the other of the outlaws.

Bearslayer turned quickly and saw that both bandits were endeavoring to take advantage of the diversion the Washoe's coming had created in their favor. Captain Cuba Kidd was nearly down to the ground while Dug Tarr was making for the nearest thicket on the double-quick.

Seeing that one of them was bound to escape the young hunter leveled his rifle on the outlaw chief just as that worthy's feet touched the ground.

The villain saw the deadly rifleman's movement and believing the fatal shot was about to be fired at him he threw himself flat upon the earth.

Little-Fox sprang forward a few paces, fixed an arrow to his bow and quickly sent the missile after the fleeing Dug Tarr. But the distance was long and the arrow fell low piercing the calf of the villain's leg and causing him to rear with pain. But scarcely halting he jerked the barb from the limb and sped on like a frightened buck.

Bearslayer laughed outright at the lively motions of the outlaw chief, and in mocking tones, called out:

"Come, rise up there, William Riley; I'm no idol that you need prostrate yourself in the dirt before me. Come, the escape of your chum's not going to make the situation any better for

you. Come this way; I want to introduce you to my friend, Little-Fox, who's a scientific scalp-slider. I know it's hard to come to this, Captain Cuba Kidd, but then you know the way of the transgressor is hard. A few minutes ago I stood—ay, almost dangled, under a limb up yonder, when along came a friendly arrow and—presto! the scene changes. I now recognize in this Washoe here my rescuer—that is, with the aid of the grizzly, he was my salvation. And glance at his girdle, Cuba, and behold how swiftly the hand of justice is doing its work among Cuba Kidd's Sierra Tigers."

While the boy was delivering this speech Cuba Kidd arose from his lowly position and with long quick strides advanced toward his enemy with a look of affected defiance. When he was about twenty feet away Bearslayer bade him halt.

"It is well," the villain fairly hissed, "that I am not permitted to come in reach of you!"

"That's what I thought," replied young Hooker, "for I know you are a bold, bad man. But now you'll have to submit to have your hands tied at your back, and I guess Little-Fox here will do the rope-act for you."

The outlaw's face grew black with rage.

Little-Fox, the Friendly, took a lariat from the saddle of one of the seven horses hitched near, and advanced to the side of the outlaw with a grin upon his painted face.

The bandit was inclined to resist being bound, and struck the red-skin a sounding blow on the head that sent him to grass; but quick as lightning the Washoe flitted himself around while yet down, and seizing the outlaw round the ankles, jerked his feet from under him, and threw him violently backward upon the earth.

Quite a struggle then ensued, in which Bearslayer took an active part; and not until Kidd had been dealt a stunning blow on the head was the desperate and athletic villain overcome and his hands secured at his back. In fact, the struggle with him convinced Bearslayer that it was a good thing that they did not have the other outlaw to contend with, for he had found that the outlaws had greater respect for his skill as a rifleman than his physical prowess.

After Kidd had been secured, Bearslayer said to the Washoe:

"Now, Little-Fox, I've a chance to thank you with all my heart for your timely service. You done some noble work for me."

"Little-Fox is the Bearslayer's friend; he always divide bread and meat with Little-Fox—have little, have much. They have hunted together, slept in same wigwam; they much good friends."

And so they were. A mutual friendship existed between the young red-skin scout and the boy hunter. Deeds of daring in each other's behalf, like the one we have just witnessed, had wrought a bond of union between them that only death could sever. Their friendship for each other had been the means of bringing about a lasting peace between Little-Fox's tribe and the white miners. This fact had made the outlaws and Washoes enemies, and many and deadly were the blows that the cunning Little-Fox had dealt the bandits who alone found friends among the more powerful and bloodthirsty Utes.

After talking a few minutes, Bearslayer proposed to divide the outlaws' horses and weapons with the Washoe. To this proposition, the Indian replied:

"Me take one, two, three horses. Found pale-face squaws and man over here—give them horses."

"What? did you find two women and a man in these hills?" exclaimed Bearslayer; and even Cuba Kidd turned his head to catch the answer.

"Yes—two heap pretty squaws—one brave—big belly—way out—so," and the Indian held his hand out at arm's length before him to illustrate his idea of Webfoot's corporeity.

"Webfoot Mose! I'll bet a grizzly-skin!" exclaimed the boy.

"That him name," said the Indian.

"Well, who ever dreamt of such a thing of Webfoot Mose?" the boy went on in complete surprise; "that's the man, Mr. Kidd, that rescued the girls, and the last one I'd ever thought of. He's the chap that killed your Denver Pete. But why didn't—pshaw! what's the use wasting time? Little-Fox, I will go with you right now to where you left the pale-faces. They are my friends. We will escort you, Captain Cuba, along with us. I know those girls will be glad to look upon the leader of the wild Sierra Tigers."

"Boy," said the outlaw chief, "you may live to beg favors of the leader of the Sierra Tigers. The end of this thing is not yet, and even though

you may slay me, you will find that I have friends where you least expect to meet them."

"I'll take care of the present and you, captain, and let the future take care of itself and your friends," was Bearslayer's rejoinder.

A horse was brought up and the outlaw given his permission to mount and ride or be led behind with a lariat attached to a saddle. He chose the former and after being assisted into the saddle his feet were tied together by ropes passing from one foot to the other under the animal's belly.

Little-Fox concluded to walk and lead the prisoner's horse.

Bearslayer tied the other horses together, mounted one and bade the Indian lead the way.

They started off down the canyon but had gone but a short distance when the Indian stopped, threw up his hand and uttered a low exclamation.

"Something come!" he said, peering down the defile through the shadows of the pines.

Before Bearslayer could respond a rather novel sight appeared before them. It was Webfoot Mose mounted upon an Indian pony. His face bore marks of violence and his clothing was badly torn.

Bearslayer dismounted as he rode up, and in a tone that betrayed no little fear and suspense, exclaimed:

"Good Lord, Webfoot! what has happened?"

"Boy, I'm glad to meet you; the devil's to pay," was the fat man's reply, given in a most serious tone as he rolled his bulky form from the pony's back.

"Has anything happened the girls?"

"Yes, Cuba Kidd's outlaws have got them!"

A cold, sardonic laugh broke from the lips of the outlaw-chief, but it came near costing him his life, for Bearslayer, in a fit of rage, drew a revolver and would have slain him but for the arrest of his act by the hand of the Washoe.

"Don't shoot more—pistol make noise—Utes in hills," the Indian said; "knife—arrow no make noise."

"How many of the demons are there yet?"

Bearslayer asked, turning to Mose, his face white with rage.

"Ten," answered Mose; "I give them the best I had, but they were too many for me, and I had to yield."

"How came you to get away from them?"

"They sent me away—to bear a message to Judge Shannon, the import of which is that for fifty thousand dollars and no questions asked, the girls will be restored to him unharmed."

"Ha! ha! ha!" burst in mocking laughter from Kidd's lips, "you'll find, Sir Bearslayer, that the Sierra Tigers hold a full hand yet!"

As he concluded his speech, he dug his heels against his horse's side and uttered a sharp cry. The animal, evidently the villain's own, and trained to that cry, shot away like an arrow, snatching the rein from Little-Fox's hand. But Bearslayer, who was standing a few paces in front of the animal, was as quick as it, and as it shot past him he leaped forward and grasped the reins; but as he did so he was jerked off his feet and dragged along by the frantic horse that was in a fair way to escape, when the Indian, whipping out his knife, sprung forward with the quickness of a tiger, and with one sweep of the blade hamstringed the animal.

With a snort of pain the poor beast fell back upon its haunches, and Bearslayer, regaining his feet, stepped backward and drawing his revolver fired at the outlaw. But again he escaped death, for the floundering horse throwing up its head received the bullet in its brain, and with a piteous groan it rolled over on its side, pinioning its rider under its quivering body.

CHAPTER XII.

A DESPERATE BATTLE.

A SHARP cry of pain escaped the lips of the foiled outlaw as the horse fell upon his leg almost crushing it.

"Give it up after awhile, won't you, captain?" Bearslayer asked, advancing to the side of the prostrate bandit whose face was black and contorted with all the rage of an incarnate fiend.

Webfoot Mose dismounted to confer with Bearslayer, and to assist in removing the dead horse from Cuba Kidd's leg. But before anything had been done the "thrum" of Little-Fox's bow-string was heard and it was immediately followed by a savage wail from the woods hard by.

"Good Lord! what's the matter, Little-Fox?" exclaimed Bearslayer turning to the Washoe.

"Bad Ingins—Utes come there!" was the startling response of the Indian who, half crouching, glared into the shadows.

Looking down the pass Bearslayer was almost horrified to see a score or more savage forms stealthily gliding from tree to tree and stone to stone toward them. Within fifty paces of them a warrior lay behind a rock writhing in agony and trying to withdraw from his shoulder Little-Fox's arrow.

"By smotheration!" exclaimed Webfoot, "there's either a big fight or a lively run on hand!"

Bearslayer took up his rifle and brought it to his shoulder and at the first opportunity downed a savage whose death wail was answered by a defiant yell from two-score throats, and the whizz of arrows through the air about the young hunter and his friends.

Two of the horses were wounded by the barbed missiles and a stampede of the animals followed.

"Boys," exclaimed Bearslayer, "we've got to retreat. I'll put a bullet through Captain Cuba—"

His remarks were here cut short by a loud shout behind him, and turning the boy was rejoiced to see Old Redwood Bill, Judge Shannon and the passengers of the ill-fated stage-coach coming toward them. But as none of them except Old Bill were armed with rifles the youth at once realized that even all of them could never cope with the horde of Ute savages swarming through the woods.

"Hurrah, Old Bill!" yelled Webfoot Mose, "here's the place to try your Damascus mettle!"

"Boys!" the old hunter cried as he came up, "you're in a hill of a perdicament, ar'n't ye? How many million o' the red devils be there?"

"More than we can handle if they make a charge," said Bearslayer, as he flung his rifle to his shoulder and took a red-skin on the wing.

"Bearslayer," exclaimed Judge Shannon, "do you know aught of my daughter and niece?"

"Webfoot Mose tells me they are in the power of the outlaws," replied the boy.

"Oh, my God!" the distracted father cried, "it is as I feared!"

But there was no time for explanations now. The Utes were coming closer and closer, though keeping under cover of tree and rock. White men were seen among them, and Bearslayer was sure he got a glimpse of the villain, Dug Tarr, among the very nearest. The Indians were mostly armed with bows and arrows, though a few possessed guns of inferior kinds.

Our friends took refuge behind rocks and trees, Bearslayer keeping close to the prostrate form of Cuba Kidd, determined that, if the foe made a charge, he would slay the outlaw chief and run. He knew that it would be useless to undertake to contend in a hand-to-hand fight with the savages, for they undoubtedly outnumbered them ten to one.

The sound of the whizzing arrows, and the "click" of their barbed points against the rocks behind which the whites were concealed, was music to the heart of Captain Cuba Kidd. But he knew that he dare not utter a word, or show any demonstrations of joy over the difficulty of his captors, through fear of provoking them into shooting him. That the conflict would ultimately end in favor of the Indians he had not a doubt. He could see enough of the red-skins' movements to understand what they were up to, and that was to surround the whites before making a charge, and this they were rapidly doing.

But suddenly there arose a deafening yell on the right of the canyon, that seemed to startle both Utes and whites. The latter started with blanched faces. They saw that another band of savages had arrived on the field of battle. They could see them swarming over the brush-covered hills, and sweeping down into the valley like destruction.

Bearslayer was in the act of giving word for his friend to flee, when Little-Fox glided to his side in wild excitement and said:

"Little-Fox's friends come there—Washoe warriors!"

Then the young red-skin uttered a defiant war-whoop. His friends answered it, and for several moments the canyon fairly shook with the yells of first the Washoes and then the Utes.

After the yelling had somewhat subsided, a general battle began. The Washoes were in force equal to their enemy, and like them, armed principally with bows and arrows.

The woods fairly roared with the flight of arrows. The rifles of Bearslayer and Old Redwood Bill chimed in regularly and with effect. The brunt of battle was now between the Indians, but there was a party armed with revolvers that seemed to turn their fire in the direction of the whites. From what he could see of this party, Bearslayer was satisfied that they

were white men and, without a doubt, outlaws who had the release of their leader in view.

But the Boy Hunter was on the alert. He devoted his attention to the security of the bandit chief, and turned his rifle against those he mistrusted of being the outlaw's followers.

Fierce and furious waged the battle. Neither side seemed to gain any advantage. They fought, Indian fashion, from behind cover of trees, bushes and rocks.

"Say, boy," said Old Redwood Bill to the Boy Hunter, after the conflict had raged for some minutes; "s'pose we end this fight by we whites all makin' a tumultuous charge upon them darned Utes? An Ingin can't stand a charge o' white men, and if we can get 'em started on a run the Washoes can finish the fight. What do you say?"

"I'm ready for anything," responded the boy, "and I'll speak to the rest of our friends about it."

He crept from one to the other of the whites and made known Old Bill's proposition, in which all readily acquiesced; and at a signal from Bearslayer, every man sprung from his concealment, and with a yell that sounded above the roar of conflict charged into the woods firing their revolvers as they advanced.

The din and noise made by this little party was most terrific. Like incarnate thunder they hurled themselves into the very midst of the astonished Utes who, as the old hunter and Indian-fighter had anticipated, broke and ran like so many sheep. The Washoes, with a yell of triumph, took up the chase and soon the sound of battle had rolled away into the distant hills.

Our friends did not follow up the enemy, but at once turned back to care for their friends who had fallen in the charge. Of these one had been killed and three wounded. Bearslayer had received a painful flesh wound from an arrow in the arm, but catching sight of a white man endeavoring to take advantage of their absence to free Captain Cuba Kidd, he dashed back unmindful of his injury and shot the outlaw's would-be rescuer down before he could escape.

Kidd's bonds had been severed and, but for the fact that his leg had been completely paralyzed by the weight upon it, the scamp would have made good his escape.

In a few minutes he was in bonds again and as he realized that his friends—the Utes—had been defeated, and saw the great numbers of the victors gathering around, his courage and hopes deserted him.

Among the dead found upon the field were four white men. There were also three wounded whites found, and these Webfoot Mose recognized as belonging to the party that had captured him and the girls. This discovery led him to examine the faces of the four dead men, and he felt assured they were also some of his late captors whom he had left less than two hours before.

From the four dead outlaws, or renegades, Webfoot Mose walked over and looked at the face of the man Bearslayer had caught in the act of liberating Cuba Kidd and shot. At sight of the man's face he started back with a cry of deep surprise.

Judge Shannon who was near him advanced and asked:

"What is it, Mose? or rather, who is it?"

"Judge, do you not recognize the face of that dead man?"

Shannon scanned the face closely and replied: "I never saw the face before that I remember."

"Indeed!" exclaimed the fat man in surprise, "that is rather singular, judge, for that man was the husband of your niece, Edith Baker!"

CHAPTER XIII.

A REVELATION.

JUDGE SHANNON turned and fixed his eyes upon Webfoot Mose with the look of one who had been grossly insulted.

"What do you mean, Mose, by that assertion?" he demanded.

"Exactly what I say, Judge; according to your niece's own confession that man lying there was her husband."

"Is Edith crazy, Mose?" exclaimed the judge; "has her mind been affected by the perils of the past few hours to make such an absurd and preposterous assertion?"

"No, judge, she's as sane as you or I," Mose replied; "I presume you are surprised—Eva was. At the very sound of that man's voice Edith fell in a dead faint. Before she had fully recovered the outlaws captured all of us including that man, Daniel Florrin—that's his name out West. I did my level best to lick the whole

outfit but this bruised face and soiled dress were the result.

"The outlaws hustled Florrin away as soon as he had been disarmed, and when Edith came to her senses she gazed around her and inquired for him—calling him Walter Chase. When told by myself that he was gone she seemed easier, though the presence of the outlaws and her discovery of our predicament proved another terrible blow to her.

"We were at once hurried away, and about a mile from where we were taken we were conducted into a dark, secluded place at one side of the pass we had been following, and which puts into the main canyon about two miles below here. Having bound my hands, the outlaws withdrew a few paces to hold a conference, and while they were thus engaged Edith told us of her secret marriage with that man five years before she became an inmate of your house—a member of your family.

"Her story was substantially this: that, while she and her mother were living in Virginia somewhere, she met and became acquainted with young Chase. He called to see her a time or two, and when her mother saw that she was infatuated with the dashing Chase, she forbade his further attentions to her daughter because the old lady did not like him. She made up her mind he was a scamp, notwithstanding he came to the village from Canada with recommendations of good character signed by a minister and Members of Parliament, which were undoubtedly forgeries. But Edith was blind with infatuation—girlish infatuation—and so one day she stole away, and was secretly, clandestinely married.

"Of course, she went back home, saying nothing to her mother of the marriage. Her husband remained in the village.

"About a week after this, her mother's house was burglarized and nearly every dollar she had in the world stolen. The burglary was traced almost straight to the door of Walter Chase's boarding-house. Suspicion was fixed upon the handsome Canadian, and, getting wind of it, he skipped for parts unknown, and Edith never saw him or even heard of him again till to-day.

"She kept her marriage a secret. Her mother died soon after the robbery of her house, and Edith then went to New York to live with you, and brood over her secret which, she says, has been a gnawing canker at her heart ever since. But the Boy Hunter's bullet has divorced her from the villain!"

"My God!" exclaimed Shannon, deeply pained by the revelation; "this seems like a horrible dream, and yet Edith would not utter a falsehood. I knew nothing of her life until she came to live in my family, and while she has been a gentle, loving girl, at times happy and joyous, there have been times again when she became silent and melancholy. But this we always attributed to brooding over the death of her sainted mother of whom she always talked when in these moods. Poor child! God knows what she must have suffered in all these years. Terrible, indeed, has been her punishment for heeding not the request of her mother. And you say that is the body of the man who deceived her—Walter Chase?"

"Yes, though he was known in Gold Hill as Daniel Florrin," said Webfoot; "and what's more, he was a high-flyer there—one of the prominent citizens. He was called on to preside over a meeting the last night I was there."

"But what is he doing here in these hills?"

"Helping to abduct your daughter and nothing else, judge! That man has been a follower of Cuba Kidd. His capture to-day was all a pretense—I thought so at the time; and since he endeavored to liberate that outlaw-chief I'm satisfied of it. But his was a rather sudden taking off. But, judge, I haven't told you all. After the outlaws had held a conference, they came back and told me they'd a message to send you, and wanted me to carry it to you; and they agreed to furnish, and *did* furnish me a horse. The message was that for fifty thousand dollars in gold, or its equivalent, they would return Eva and Edith to you unharmed. While I was gone they intended to hide the girls away in a different place from where I last saw them, so that any attempt at their rescue would be futile. If you agreed to pay over the money I was to return and let them know, when the arrangements for the ransom would be made. To guard against further surprise I was to return by this route, and at some point or other I would be met by one of the band. I could do nothing else but consent to bear the message to you, and have done so, though I didn't expect to meet you so soon."

"The murderous devils!" hissed the judge; "I

hate to compromise with such wretches but will do anything to save my child."

"But see here, judge," said Mose; "great changes have taken place since I left them outlaws. There were ten of them, not counting Florrin. No less than four of them lie dead out yonder and three of them are wounded and will be killed by the Ingins and scalped just as soon as our backs are turned. Now, there can't be over three left in charge of the girls—four at furthest, and we might swoop down upon them and rescue the women before their guards hear of the death of their friends and spirit the girls away. Moreover, we've got their captain whom they've been expecting to join them all morning with Bearslayer a prisoner. It seems the captain and a few friends came around through the hills on horseback after leaving Grizzly Pass, and they were to meet over here somewhere this morning—they never once dreaming that the frisky Bearslayer would get away with the whole boiling of them. But with the help of Little-Fox, the friendly Washoe, it seems he has demolished the outfit and got the captain foul."

"Well, what do you think, Mose?—what shall I do?" the distracted father asked.

"We might effect an exchange of prisoners, judge—give Captain Kidd up for the two girls. But then I think I'd better make haste back to where I left them with the girls and see how many of the gang's left. I'm afraid if they git wind of the result of this battle they'll spirit the girls away. I'll call up Bearslayer and Redwood and get their opinion about my plans."

The two hunters were called up and consulted.

"Why not march our forces, Indians and all, down there, and deliberately rescue the girls and be done with it?" said Bearslayer.

"That might do in one sense," said Old Redwood, "but if the outlaws have got wind o' the way things stand up here rather than be defeated all around they may kill the girls or turn 'em over to the Utes who'd slay 'em too quick jist for revenge."

"That's all very true, Bill," said the impulsive Bearslayer, whose youthful blood was running hot in his veins.

"Men," said Shannon, "Webfoot Mose has shown himself equal to any emergency so far, and I am willing to let him carry out his own plans."

"That settles it," said Redwood; "perceed, Goosefoot Moses, and anything that I can do will be cheerfully did."

"Then I'm going back to the outlaws' rendezvous and try an exchange of prisoners," declared Mose; "that'll be the quickest done if accepted; but if not I'll make the arrangements for the ransom."

Without further delay the fat man struck out afoot, his horse having broken away during the battle.

As he proceeded down the canyon he was met every few rods by a Washoe warrior returning from the chase of the foe, some of them with scalps at their girdles. As few, if any of them, had ever seen the pussy man before, they stopped and deliberately gazed at him in amazement. They had never seen the likes before and some of the younger and more curious of the warriors turned and followed him away like boys following a pet bear through the street. Their curiosity was highly amusing to Mose, and yet he was quite glad when he got rid of them, and had turned from the main canyon into a narrower passage on the right.

Half a mile further on he came suddenly upon a wounded outlaw trying to make his way back to the rendezvous. He had sunk with exhaustion by the way, but as Mose came up to him he looked up and said:

"Hullo, fatty, you're gettin' around pretty quick."

"Yes, had better luck than I expected—found the judge up the gulch on his way north," replied Mose; "but it seems to me that you're hurt."

"That's no name for it, fatty; I was all shot to pieces in the fight up the pass. Didn't you hear the din of the battle? Utes and Washoes there by the thousand, and I tell you it was an awful fight. The Utes got licked but they never would if it hadn't been for about a thousand white mountaineers—all old Ingin-fighters—that charged them with bayonets. An Ingin can't stand a bayonet charge."

"I was present at that fight, old man," said Mose, amazed at the fellow's monstrous and deliberate falsehood.

"Oh, you was?" rejoined the outlaw; "then you can tell my friends that most of the boys are killed, and, tell one of them to come down."

and help me in. I'm afraid a cussed Washoe 'll find me and bang my hair."

"All right; who shall I tell them's down here wanting help?"

"Tell them it's 'Ananias Dick' and they'll understand."

With a broad smile upon his face Webfoot resumed his tramp, and a mile further on he was challenged by an outlaw.

A few moments later he stood in the presence of Eva and Edith and three of the robbers, all of whom were greatly surprised to see him back so soon.

"Oh, Moses! did you meet my dear father that you are back so soon?" Eva asked.

"Yes, I did, Miss Eva," the fat man answered. "He is but a few miles from here; but by the way, gents, Ananias Dick is lying down the pass yonder badly wounded and he wanted me to tell you to send some one to help him away."

The outlaws started uneasily.

"Who wounded him?" asked one of them, suspicious of Webfoot.

"He got hurt in a big fight up the canyon. Didn't you folks hear it? It was between the Utes and Washoes and was a scorcher."

"Which party whipped?"

"Ananias Dick said the Utes were repulsed," Webfoot answered, evasively.

"Boys, we must know more of that affair," said an outlaw; "suppose, Redwing, you and Wagner assist me to conduct the girls and this fat gentleman up to 'Number Two Rest,' and Moloch and I'll guard them while you fellows go after Ananias and the information we desire."

To this all were agreed and Webfoot informed that he must remain in the valley under guard until the two, Redwing and Wagner, returned; and, furthermore, he and the girls were to be conducted to a place of greater security further up the pass.

The fat man was disappointed, yet entered no protest against this arrangement for he knew it would be entirely useless, in the face of the odds against him.

As they turned to leave, Mose's eyes fell upon his big cane lying upon the ground near. It had been taken from him at the time of his capture with the girls, and he had given it up as lost. Stooping he picked it up, and waddled on, saying:

"Bless my eyes, this 's luck. I can't navigate without a cane to do much good."

"Ther blasted thing's heavy 'nuff to make a saint tired to tote it," said Redwing, garrulously, and the subject was thus dismissed.

The girls and the mountain tramp were hurried along over half a mile when the party, crowding close upon the right wall of the canyon, were suddenly challenged by the demand:

"Who comes there?" It was a gruff, rasping voice that spoke.

"Friends, Moloch," answered Wagner, "with prisoners."

"All right, then; advance."

They entered a thicket of low, scrubby trees and came to the mouth of a cavern in which sat a hideous, repulsive creature with but little semblance of man. He was a beardless dwarf of gigantic size, and as he arose to allow the party the cave, designated by the outlaws as "Number Two Rest," the creature's form and dress of skins recalled to Webfoot's mind the description he had heard of the African gorilla.

Into the cavern the fat man, and weary, despondent girls were taken.

The dwarf struck a light, then Redwing and Wagner hastily departed to the assistance of Ananias Dick, leaving the prisoners in the care of Moloch and the other outlaw, who answered to the name of "Falcon."

That Moloch was a man of herculean powers and savage cruelty, Webfoot had no doubt, and he shuddered when he thought what a demon the giant would be to contend with, should his anger be aroused.

It was a great relief to the maidens when the ugly wretch went back to his watch at the entrance to the cave, accompanied by Falcon.

Eager to know how their friends had all fared since they had been carried away in the coach, the maidens began to ply Webfoot with questions. The fat man told them the particulars of his meeting with them, of the battle, and his mission back into the pass.

"Oh, dear!" exclaimed Eva, when he had concluded, "if we could only escape that horrible man at the mouth of the cave we would be free!"

"Have you no weapons, Mose?" asked Edith.

"Nothing but this cane," replied the tramp, "and I was afraid they would relieve me of it. But I guess they don't think I'm a very formidable fellow."

"A club in this place would be useless against such a monster as that Moloch," declared Eva. "Besides, both of them have knives and pistols."

"I'd like to get out of here before them other fellows get back," said Mose.

"Oh, surely you would not attack that giant empty-handed, would you, Mose? He would crush you in a moment, I know he would. Do not offend him, I pray."

"Girls," said the tramp, holding up his cane, "this club is a more terrible weapon than you'd think from the looks of it. See here."

He took hold of the rough, iron ferule and pulled upon it. To the surprise of the girls they saw the cane began to grow in length. In other words, they saw there was a cane within a cane, and after it had been drawn out fully two feet, the fat man drew a third cane out of the second like the sections of a telescope. This he repeated, drawing a fourth out of the third—all four sections remaining together, making a tapering cane fully eight feet in length.

"Why! what a cane that is," remarked Eva. "It's a 'telescope' cane," said Webfoot; "and it's a masked death-trap—an ingenious contrivance that was invented by an old detective friend. Those three smaller, or inside sections, are metallic ones—all hollow, of course—which makes the club so heavy. Inside this hollow is— But there comes that sneak, Falcon, and I'll tell you the rest another time."

Falcon came up and seated himself about ten feet from Webfoot and the girls, who sat to the right of their fat friend.

An oil lamp set upon a little projection on the wall lighted the low, gloomy cave with a weak, sickly glow.

"Fatty," said Falcon, as he seated himself, "what does Judge Shannon propose to do about his girls?"

"He proposes an exchange of prisoners," said Webfoot, playfully tapping the earth before him with his long cane; "he'll release your leader, Cuba Kidd, if you'll release the girls."

"Do you mean to tell me Cuba Kidd is a prisoner in his power?" exclaimed the astonished outlaw.

"I do; I saw the captain with mine own eyes. Bearslayer broke loose among them like a tiger, killed off his men and took Cuba a prisoner."

"Then I will consent to no such an exchange," declared the outlaw, in apparent rage. "If Cuba Kidd's such a fool as to be entrapped by a boy after half of the best men in our camp have given their lives in his cause, he can go to the de'il for me, and the rest of us will take the ransom money or nothing."

"But the judge has no money with him," said Mose; "and it will take several days to get around with it from camp."

"I don't care if it takes a month!"

"But these girls will be dead by that time."

"No, I will take them over to head-quarters where they will be well cared for."

"Of course, it's for you to fix the terms, I suppose; but the judge thought you'd rather have your captain than the cash."

"For that matter, we can have both, and I will add that amendment to my first proposition—that is, for fifty thousand dollars in hand paid, and the release of Cuba Kidd, the girls will be given up; and as soon as Redwing and Wagner return you can carry the terms to the judge, and I will await his answer in this canyon. Tell him there will be no appeal from this proposition."

"Sir," said Webfoot knitting his brows, "you are unreasonable."

"That's none of your business, sir!" retorted the outlaw; "you have nothing to lose in this matter and something to gain."

"But perhaps I might make it my business."

"Vagabond! don't think because there are few of us that you can insult us with impunity. One word from me and that man Moloch will send you into quarters. Say, pass me that pole you have there; I'll take care of that."

It was Mose's "telescope" cane that he referred to. The tramp quickly raised the rod and reaching forward touched it against the outlaw's breast. As he did so, the villain uttered a shriek of awful agony, clutched at his breast, started to his feet and fell prone upon the floor in the convulsions of death.

A cry burst from the girls' lips as they started up.

"Come, gals," said Webfoot Mose, springing nimbly to his feet and blowing out the light, "we must elude that hunchback!"

The fat tramp led the way to one side of the cave to elude Moloch, who, alarmed by the cry of Falcon, was rushing like a tiger into the cave roaring out:

"Ho, Falcon! what are the matter-ah? Falcon? Falcon?"

He rushed by the crouching trio blowing like a worried ox.

"Now for open air and liberty!" whispered Webfoot Mose.

Silently yet swiftly the three hurried from the cavern. As they emerged into the open air, a roar like that of a lion sounded behind them.

"Oh, heavens!" cried Edith, "that dreadful giant has discovered our escape!"

"Easy, girls, easy!" admonished the brave and fearless Webfoot who, stopping just without the cavern, turned facing the entrance, at the same time drawing out the joints of his big cane and extending the end of it before him. The next moment Moloch came tearing from the cave the very picture of an incarnate fiend. In his hand he clutched a murderous knife and with a snarl like that of a mad beast he rushed toward Webfoot.

But the latter was on his guard and threw up the end of his lengthened cane on a line with the giant's neck and, as the latter rushed madly against it, the maidens saw a long, glittering steel blade or needle dart, like a serpent's tongue from the end of the cane and pierce the throat of the giant, the point coming out at the back of the neck.

With a gurgling roar like that of a half-strangled lion, the giant started back, clutching at the cane. He seized the end of it and endeavored to wrench it from Webfoot's hand, but the creature had received his death-wound and in the struggle sunk to his knees, his eyes glaring like a dying beast's. Webfoot jerked the cane from the fellow's yielding grasp and quickly "telescoping" the deadly instrument, began retreating from the cave.

Moloch, true to his trust unto death, endeavored to rise to his feet. The blood was spurting, with each breath, from his mouth and the wound in his hairy throat. With a superhuman effort he succeeded in gaining his feet, but staggered forward a few steps and fell heavily to rise no more.

"Now, girls, brace up," said the tramp, "and in a few minutes we will be out of danger. We've got to dodge them two fellows that went up to help Ananias Dick. The yell of that hunchback undoubtedly reached their ears and may bring them back in haste."

"Oh, Mose! what a brave, daring and noble man you are!" said Edith, as she laid her hand upon his arm and gazed up into his face through a mist of tears.

"Thanks, Miss Edith," responded the gallant Mose; "I do hope you'll *always* think that way of me; but here we go!"

The three moved briskly down the defile, Webfoot keeping a sharp lookout for Redwing and Wagner.

Presently he saw the two outlaws coming on a run without their wounded friend. They had undoubtedly heard Moloch's cry and were hastening back to learn the cause.

The fugitives quickly concealed themselves in a dense thicket until the outlaws had passed, then they resumed their flight.

They soon came to where Ananias Dick lay groaning in terrible misery.

"Well, old man, you're still in a terrible shape, ar'n't you?" Mose said to him.

"Yes; but how did you git the gals, fatty?" asked the wounded wretch in apparent surprise.

"Made an exchange for them," responded Webfoot.

"Fatty, I mistrust foul play. You're a bad, deceptive man, and I'd like to live to see you hung, but I guess I sha'n't. The boys told me your folks had Cuba Kidd a prisoner. Give Cuba my compliments and tell him I'll see him later on t'other side o' the range."

"All right, Ananias," replied Webfoot, as he passed on down the defile after the girls, his eye and ear on the alert for danger.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE END OF IT ALL.

WHILE awaiting the return of Webfoot Mose Judge Shannon and his friends whom we left on the battle-field were not altogether idle. The body of Dan Florrin was given burial along with the white friends and foes that had fallen in battle. Bearslayer recognized in Florrin the man who had often visited his cabin as a friend, and whom a wounded outlaw confessed was known among the outlaws as Lieutenant Zill, the man who led the masked bandits the night of the raid on Bearslayer's cabin, and who so narrowly escaped death the same night at the Devil's Gap where two of his men fell at the hand of a silent foe. It was also learned that Florrin was Kidd's trusted spy, and the man

who furnished the information of Judge Shannon's expected return to camp with his daughter, and helped lay the plans for her abduction.

Cuba Kidd regarded the scene around him with a silent, dejected spirit, for, as one after another of his followers was brought in from the field dead, he began to realize that he had but few friends left and that his wicked career was about to draw to a close.

The party concluded to await the return of Webfoot before taking any further action regarding the disposition of the bandit chief. The Washoes were eager to take his scalp but Shannon was afraid his death might indirectly jeopardize the lives of the girls.

Hours were passed in anxious waiting, and Bearslayer was growing decidedly uneasy at Webfoot's prolonged absence, when suddenly a buzz of excitement stirred the assembled band of Washoes and in an instant every man was upon his feet. To the joy of all Webfoot and the girls were seen approaching from down the valley.

A few moments later, amid shouts of joy, Eva and Edith were clasped to the breast of the happy father and uncle while cheers for Webfoot Mose, the hero of the hour, rung in prolonged echoes through the mountains.

Edith Baker, as soon as all had become quiet, hastened to tell her uncle and friends of the heroic courage of Webfoot Mose, and narrate the daring and skillful manner in which he had effected their escape from the cavern.

Bearslayer quietly listened to her story and when she had finished he walked up to Webfoot and said:

"Mose, you're a deceptive fraud. Confound you! you are the very critter that played the Dragon of the Devil's Gap a few nights ago. However, I mistrusted you'd something to do with it, and now I want you to show up the secrets of that old club of a cane."

"I'll do so, Bearslayer, my boy," said Webfoot after a hearty laugh; and then taking up his cane he drew it out section by section and holding it out before him said:

"Now watch the end."

Every eye was at once focused on the end of the cane. Webfoot pressed an almost invisible button when to the surprise of all a long, slender dagger fully ten inches in length darted out like a serpent's tongue and as quickly sprung back into the hollow of the cane.

"That explains all," said Webfoot; "that's the dragon's fang, Bearslayer—an ingenious contrivance of an old friend made upon the principle of a spring lancet. It's a silent and deadly weapon."

"I can testify to that, Webfoot, you bold, brave, fat rascal," replied Bearslayer completely surprised by the revelation of the mystery of Devil's Gap.

Cuba Kidd was turned over to the Washoes for punishment. What the Indians did with him was never known; but certain it is that the villain was never heard of again.

The party, under the guidance of Bearslayer, finally turned their faces toward Virginia City, satisfied all dangers were passed, for a time at least. In due course of time they reached the camp, tired and weary, though in good spirits.

Judge Shannon invited Bearslayer, Webfoot and Old Redwood Bill to become his guests at the hotel where he stopped, but this invitation all three respectfully declined. Webfoot and Redwood had previously promised to stop a few days with Bearslayer, and after taking leave of the judge and his fair friends the trio repaired to the humble cabin of the Boy Hunter.

The return of Webfoot Mose, the tramp, became known through the camp before night, and shortly after dark who should call at the young hunter's cabin but a party of masked Vigilantes, who informed Mose that his time had come, and that they proposed to deal with him as with all other tramps who had disregarded their warnings.

Bearslayer and Redwood interceded with a strong plea for the fat man, but the Vigilantes were immovable, and they were about to remove Mose from the cabin when he said:

"Gentlemen, I see you will not listen to the appeals of my friends, therefore, I will have to make a disclosure in order to save myself. I now deny the charge of being a tramp or dead-beat, although, at times, I have personated such characters. Please read that before you proceed further."

He handed a Vigilante a folded parchment which the man unfolded and read aloud.

To the astonishment of all it proved to be the commission of an agent in the Secret Service of the Federal Government—which was, at the time of which we write—1863—engaged in the great war for the Union—with the rank of cap-

tain. The name therein was Moses S. Farland. It was signed by the Secretary of War, and the chief of the Secret Service. There was no doubt of its being genuine, and so there and then the Vigilantes made *amends-honorable* for their conduct toward him.

Of course, Captain Farland accepted the apology in a very amiable way, adding:

"But I presume I should explain my conduct and acts of vagabondage; well, you know the mining-camps, Indian villages and outlaw ranks have been the refuge of army deserters, 'bounty-jumpers' and 'conscription-dodgers.' It was to hunt up this class of fellows that I was assigned to duty in Virginia City and outlying camps. I concluded I could work best in the guise of a bum, my corporosity aiding me immensely in this. That's why I have been content to be known as Webfoot Mose. I have been the means of having dozens of men arrested and carried away by the provost marshals. Now this, gentlemen, is all there is in it."

"Confound your fat picture!" exclaimed Redwood Bill, "if you ain't a delightful fraud I never met one. But then, you have proven yourself worthy o' the shoulder-straps o' a brigadier-general, and I'm goin' to recommend your promotion to Uncle Abe. Gentlemen, Webfoot—beg parding—Captain Farland, is a rustler in fat. I've tested him myself. See that purple lump there on my cheek? He did it t'other night, and he did it sweetly."

"But what in creation did you ever suffer yourself to be driven out of camp for when you could have set yourself right?" questioned one of the Vigilantes.

"It was the best act of my life," declared Mose, "for I was the means of saving Bearslayer at the Devil's Gap, and think I have been of great service to Judge Shannon's party. My object in going into the hills, however, was to hunt out a nest of deserters that I had reason to believe were hiding away there somewhere."

Thus the conversation lasted for some time. Webfoot and Bearslayer narrated their adventures in the hills with the outlaws and Indians. Mose showed the Vigilantes his wonderful cane and explained its ingenious mechanical arrangements.

It was late when the conservators of law and order left the cabin, having pledged Captain Farland their assistance in his work whenever called upon.

Through Judge Shannon the destruction of Cuba Kidd's band of outlaws became known the next day. This brought Webfoot Mose, as well as the fearless Bearslayer and Redwood Bill, into greater prominence than ever; and then it was not long until the fat man's true character became known throughout the camp, and there was no one in the place so honored and *feted* as the gallant captain.

Mose was a frequent and welcome guest at the home of Judge Shannon, and, although he left Virginia City in a few weeks, he kept up a regular correspondence with the judge, Edith and Bearslayer. Some two years later he returned to the famous mountain city and, to the surprise of everybody, except his most intimate friends, became the husband of the lovely Edith; and who dares to say that he had not won her heart by all that was fair, gallant and brave?

And still a few years later there was another wedding at the Shannon mansion. It was that of the beautiful Eva to the handsome, dashing Edward Hooker, or Bearslayer as we have known him, now assistant superintendent of the great Stockholm Mine.

The brave old stage-driver, Prince John, was never heard of after leaving his friends in Grizzly Pass, although Redwood Bill and Bearslayer made a long and patient search for him. He had no doubt been slain by the outlaws; but his bravery and kindness of heart will ever be held in grateful memory by those who knew his real worth and character.

THE END.

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BEADLE AND ADAMS, Publishers,
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